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# African American Male College Students' Experience of College Preparation

Linda Denice Valentine-Cobb  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Counselor Education & Supervision

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Linda Valentine-Cobb

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Walden University

2017

Abstract

African American Male College Students'  
Personal Experience of College Preparation

by

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Counseling Education, Concordia University, Mequon, WI, 2007

Elementary Education, Lander University, Greenwood, SC, 1993

Education, Anderson University, Anderson, SC, 1990

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Counselor Education Supervision

Walden University

November 2017

## Abstract

African American male students have a high risk of not completing high school and not going to college. Students receive some college preparation as early as middle school, yet it is not enough to increase the number of African American male high school or college graduates. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe what 18–24-year-old African American male college students recalled from middle school and high school about college preparation, college planning, and college attendance. Critical race theory was used to reveal how outside factors such as oppression, racism, or socioeconomic status prevent African American male students from attending college. The research questions sought to understand (a) college preparation experiences in high school, (b) influential decisions they made to attend college, and (c) the characteristics of a successful pathway to college for African American males. Data were collected from 7 participants who answered in-depth questions via in-person or phone interviews, which resulted in 4 major themes. Results showed that African American male students experienced inequalities and barriers during their school years, and they were aware of segregation between schools. Predominately White Schools had better opportunities for students' success; opposed to predominately Black schools, which had less opportunities for student success. Participants described the inequalities they saw or felt regarding the differences in schools, their teachers' behaviors, and perceptions from society. This study has the potential to make a positive social change in society with specific focus on educational institutes. Therefore, if educational institutes at the district and state levels advocate for African American male students, they can become college graduates.

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## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Lula Mae Valentine, who was a strong supporter of education and who always supported me in my educational endeavors. Rest in peace mother, and I know you are smiling down from heaven with tears of joy. I love you always, and you are forever in my heart.

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## Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Background of the Study.....	6
Problem Statement.....	10
Purpose of the Study.....	11
Research Question.....	11
Conceptual Framework.....	12
Nature of the Study.....	13
Method.....	13
Definition of Key Terms.....	14
Assumptions.....	16
Scope and Delimitations.....	18
Limitations.....	19
Significance of the Study.....	21
Implications for Social Change.....	24
Summary.....	25



Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	27
Introduction.....	27
Literature Search Strategy.....	33
Theoretical Framework.....	35
A History of Segregation and Desegregation.....	44
Court Cases.....	44
Illinois.....	51
The Achievement Gap for African American Students.....	53
Student Perceived Barriers.....	55
Teachers' Perceptions.....	59
Students' Perceptions of Environmental Factors.....	67
Teachers.....	67
Counselors.....	69
Programs.....	73
Summary.....	76
Chapter 3: Research Design.....	79
Introduction.....	79

Research Design and Rationale.....	80
Restatement of Research Questions.....	80
Rational for Research Questions.....	81
Research Method.....	84
Research Approach Considerations.....	84
Role of the Researcher.....	86
Researcher Bias.....	86
Addressing Research Bias.....	87
Researcher Role in the Study.....	87
Methodology.....	87
Participant Selection.....	87
Data Collection.....	89
Data Analysis.....	92
Verification of Trustworthiness.....	95
Ethical Issues.....	97
Summary.....	99
Chapter 4: Results.....	101

Introduction.....	101
Setting.....	101
Demographics.....	102
Data Collection.....	104
Variation in Data.....	105
Data Analysis.....	106
Evidence of Trustworthiness.....	108
Credibility.....	108
Transferability.....	109
Dependability.....	109
Confirmability.....	110
Study Results.....	111
Theme 1: Awareness of Inequality/Stereotypes/Discrimination.....	111
Theme 2: Support from Influential People Who Helped Participants for Colle.....	121
Theme 3: Experiences with Programs.....	133
Theme 4: Importance of Teacher/Student Relationships.....	137
Summary.....	139

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations.....	143
Introduction.....	143
Interpretation of Findings.....	145
Limitations of the Study.....	153
Recommendations.....	154
Implications.....	156
Summary.....	160
References.....	162
Appendix A: Request for Participants.....	175
Appendix B: Interview Guide.....	177
Appendix C: Demographic Questionnaire.....	181

## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

It is important to talk to students early about higher education. In fact, Huerta, Watt, and Butcher (2013) shared how middle school is where students start planning a college or career path, and they maintain focus on their chosen path all the way through high school. Huerta, Watt, and Butcher (2013) explained that during the middle school years, either students show interest in post-secondary education or they show disinterest in education. Middle school, therefore, is a vital time in career and college planning (Gibbons & Borders, 2010); it is the foundation for preparing all students for high school and post-secondary education. In fact, students who start planning for college in middle school begin making behavioral and academic choices that will later improve their chances for college acceptance (Cabrera, Deli-Amen, Terenzini, Lee, & Franklin, Jr., 2006). AVID and GEAR UP are two programs that begin preparing students for college in middle school by increasing their college awareness. AVID, which is designed to prepare underrepresented students for college, “begins as early as 6<sup>th</sup> grade and provides an elective class that focuses on writing, inquiry, collaboration, and reading strategies that support students in their quest to take rigorous college preparation classes” (Huerta et al., 2013, p. 27). GEAR UP is similar to AVID in that it is a comprehensive program designed to help low-income students and their families learn about, plan for, and prepare for college inside and outside of school (Cabrera et al., 2006). Students who begin the AVID and GEAR UP programs in middle school excel in high school, graduate from high school, and transition into an institution of higher learning (Huerta et al., 2013). The

more middle school students are actively engaged in college preparatory activities, the more prepared they are for both, high school and college (Huerta et al., 2013).

But even when programs exist in middle schools, completing high school and going to college is still a challenge for some students, especially African Americans, who show poor college readiness compared to other populations (Radcliffe & Stephens, 2008). In fact, for the school years 2011–2012, 86% of White students graduated from high school, compared with only 69% of Black students (Stetser & Stillwell, 2014). There is progress, but it is slow. For the school years 2014-2015, 87.6% of White students graduated from high school compared with only 74.6% of Black students (Curriculum Review, 2016). Clearly much work is needed for African American students to gain equality regarding their education and future success.

For several decades, researchers have focused on students' academic performance and educational equity in public schools. In the past ten years, researchers have stressed the importance of preparing minority and underserved middle school students for high school and post-secondary education (Radcliffe & Bos, 2011). However, many students do not graduate from high school or attend college because of an inadequate curriculum or inadequate preparation for college (Huerta et al., 2013). Radcliffe and Bos (2011) reported that the scale scores for reading, math, and science of African American and Hispanic eighth grade students indicated they were being poorly prepared for higher education. To be successful, students need a rigorous academic curriculum. Inner-city African American students want to attend college and understand the importance of doing

well in school to gain entrance (Blustein et al., 2010). But they need the moral support and guidance to overcome negative stereotypes they experience in middle school (Blustein et al., 2010). According to Gibbons and Borders (2010), it is important that school counselors, teachers, and parents advocate on behalf of inner-city African American students so that they can achieve their goals of attending college.

While the quantitative literature has identified a lack of college preparation among African American youth, there is a lack of understanding about African American students' awareness and perceptions of educational inequality (Storz, 2008). Researchers who studied student inequality in schools focused on their learning process, their daily routines and procedures, student morale, and student-teacher relationships; they did not obtain the perspective of students (Storz, 2008). Researchers rarely consult with students for their insights and perspectives in educational research, which has caused a gap in the literature. The goal of this study was to help close the gap.

The purpose of this study was to describe what 18–24-year-old African American male college students recalled from middle school and high school about college preparation, college planning, and college attendance. Because African American male students do receive less attention and have negative connotations placed upon them, it was important for me to focus on African American male students for my research study. It was necessary for African American male students' perspectives to be heard so that teachers, counselors, administrators, and parents can see the challenges they endure and

can begin to understand the psychosocial developmental needs of African American male students with respect to college preparation.

Therefore, I chose to focus on African American male students, as opposed to other students, for several reasons. In 2011, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reported that only 10% of African American male eighth graders scored at the Proficient level in eighth grade reading. As a result, only 52% of these students are graduating from high school in 4 years compared with 78% of White males (Holzman, 2012). Graves (2010) reported that African American males have the lowest performance on standardized assessments of academic achievement, and less than 8% of African American males between the ages of 15 and 29 are college graduates. One reason for the low percentages for African American males results from a lack of parental support for their sons. Parents have higher academic and graduation expectations for females than males.

Another reason I focused on African American male students was because of the vast differences in their educational experiences compared to African American females. African American male students view education differently than do African American female students. According to Cokley, McClain, Jones, and Johnson (2011), African American male students have more negative attitudes towards their teachers than female students. They feel differently about their teachers and behave differently because of their lower academic performance, the punishments they receive for bad conduct, and the likelihood of receiving corporal punishment (2011). In fact, African American male



students receive more suspensions, expulsions, and special education placements than female students. Equally important, teachers have different perceptions and lower expectations of African American male students than African American female students. “As a result of their negative experiences, African American male students have a higher potential for experiencing psychological disengagement, academic disidentification and increased frustration” (p. 63). These negative experiences set the tone for African American male students remaining educational journey. In contrast, African American female students have higher academic aspirations and perform better academically than African American male students. Female students have higher GPAs than male students and they are not punished in the same way as African American male students.

A phenomenological study was designed to describe what 18-24-year-old African American male college students recalled from middle school and high school about college preparation, college planning, and college attendance. The study provided an opportunity for a marginalized group to speak out, to share their experiences, and to acknowledge the barriers that impede their academic success. As a result of the study, it was expected that counselors and educators would recognize an increased need to implement programs for African American male students, starting in middle school and continuing in high school, to help enhance their college readiness.

### **Background of the Study**

However, the following describes selected articles relating to inner city African American students regarding college preparation, obstacles that students encounter, and finally current intervention programs related to encouraging college attendance.

Radcliffe and Stephens (2008) addressed the problem of underserved adolescents not receiving adequate preparation for postsecondary education and the workforce by launching a seven-year, longitudinal quasi-experimental study with 100 at-risk African American 6<sup>th</sup> grade students to show the effects implementing a college culture program has on them. Radcliffe and Stephens (2008) concluded that creating college cultures increased African American students' awareness of college opportunities, as well as empowered them with positive self-concept and self-esteem. They based the study on the Creating a College Culture Project, which was designed to create a college culture among at-risk diverse adolescents who may never graduate from high school. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), only 49% of African American students graduate from high school (Radcliffe & Stephens, 2008). Therefore, Radcliffe and Stephens (2008) investigated how creating a college culture using four components: mentoring, technology, college campus visits, and parental involvement impact at-risk African American middle school students' aspirations to attend college. They collected data by using surveys, interviews, reflective statements, and student academic performance measures; and analyzed data with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Findings from the study revealed that, after a college culture

experience, students' perceptions about college became more positive and they became more excited about attending college.

African American inner-city students encounter many obstacles that prevent them from attending college, including their ethnicity. They encounter stereotypes and discrimination, which lowers their self-esteem and morale for attending college. Blustein et al. (2010) provided research that revealed students' awareness of culture bias and stereotypes received due to their ethnicity. The researchers provided a narrative research regarding students' philosophy about school, work, and participation in education programs in relation to race and success. They interviewed students and learned that students recognized the effect racism produced in regards to their education. In addition, Blustein et al. (2010) discovered that most of the students understood the importance of doing well in school to gain college acceptance and possessed the desire to attend college, but they lacked the moral support and guidance to overcome the negative connotations. Blustein et al. (2010) concluded that students showed awareness that society presented low expectations of their success in relation to their ethnicity.

Additionally, Cabera et al. (2006) conducted a study showing how intervention programs enhance students' college preparation. The researchers examined the impact of Comprehensive Intervention Programs (CIP) on sixth grade students' preparedness for college by examining reading and mathematics achievement. In the study, Cabera et al. (2006) explained how a "CIP program, GEAR UP, provided assistance to nearly one million low-income middle school students and their families to learn about, plan for, and

prepare for college” (p. 82). Leaders of the GEAR UP program collaborated with colleges, universities, community organizations, and businesses to provide students with precollege interventions. Stakeholders began working with students in sixth grade and continued working with them through high school, trying to accelerate their academic achievements (Cabera et al., 2006). The results of the program indicated students’ reading and math skills improved significantly and their college readiness levels increased. Cabera et al. (2006) showed the effectiveness of CIPs regarding student’s college readiness.

To add to the above literature, Wimberly and Noeth (2005) conducted a study regarding the ACT Policy Report summary of sixth through eighth grade students. The study was an addition to previous policy reports and provided data to support the reasoning for college preparatory programs to begin as early as sixth grade (Wimberly & Noeth, 2005). The researchers examined what effect of early exploration and planning in certain college readiness areas had on students, as well as how people and school-based factors helped students set goals and develop a postsecondary plan. The results from the study indicated that low-income middle school students aspire to attend college, but their school programs fail to prepare them. Seventy-eight percent of middle school students indicated they had begun to think about going to college, yet only 66% of the students described their school program as college preparatory (Wimberly & Noeth, 2005). Additionally, Wimberly and Noeth (2005) discovered that teachers, counselors, administrators, and parents did not collaborate or implement effective programs that would help students acquire skills and knowledge necessary to attend a postsecondary

institution. However, Wimberly and Noeth (2005) asserted that when counselors, parents, educators, and community members do collaborate to establish effective programs for students, college readiness become a reality for inner city African American students.

Gibbons and Borders (2010) focused on outside factors that prevented inner-city African American students from attending college. The researchers found that many African American adolescents plan to attend college; but outside factors such as barriers and weak family support prevented them from achieving their goals. Influential leaders in African American low-income students' lives, however, were found to make a difference in preparing them for college. Based on findings, Gibbons and Borders (2010) asserted that parents need to work together to prepare inner-city African American middle school students for college.

Finally, Huerta, Watt, and Butcher (2013) examined the effects of Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) in middle school has on middle school course rigor and students' high school performance and college readiness. AVID was developed to prepare underrepresented students for 4-year colleges and universities. Huerta, Watt, and Butcher (2013) conducted a study to determine the impact AVID has on students in middle and high school. The study compared students who took AVID in middle and high school with those who only took AVID in high school. Herta, Watt, and Butcher (2013) concluded that implementing AVID in middle school provides more benefits than implementing it only in high school.

### **Problem Statement**

African American male students are not being prepared for college for several reasons including; lack of resources, environmental factors, location of their middle and high schools, lack of knowledge about college preparation. By the time students reach eighth grade, over 80% have set goals to attend college (Wimberly & Noeth, 2005). According to Gibbons and Borders (2010), children at this age do have a plan to attend at least a 4-year college. However, many inner-city African American male students never achieve their goals for several reasons, including lack of resources or support from school, environmental factors such as low social economic status (SES), no one else in their family who attended college, where they live, and lack of knowledge about college preparation (Radcliffe & Stephens, 2010). According to Blustein et al. (2010), inner-city African American students are at high risk of not completing high school and not advancing into college. A gap exists because researchers have not conducted studies that allowed 18–24-year-old African American male students' share the information they received during middle and high school regarding postsecondary education. Therefore, a need exists for administrators, teachers, counselors, and other stakeholders to understand what it was that encouraged African American male students to attend college. A study of African American male students, between the ages of 18 and 24, who are attending college, could provide important information about pathways to higher education that educators in middle and high school may be missing. Studying this group of older adolescents in college might inform counselors in middle and high school about additional support and interventions that could encourage African American male

students to enroll in college, a population that is currently underrepresented in college student bodies. The purpose of this research will be discussed next.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to describe what 18-24-year-old African American male college students recalled from middle school and high school about college preparation, college planning, and college attendance. While there is quantitative research that shows a lack of college preparation and attendance among African American youth (Storz, 2008), there are no phenomenological studies that describe the lived experiences of 18–24-year-old African American male college students back in middle school and high school regarding college preparation, college planning, and college attendance. Hence, this study provided an opportunity for a marginalized group to speak out and share their experiences, and in the process, explain the barriers that impeded their academic success. Participants shared what they experienced in middle and high school that encouraged or did not encourage college preparation, college planning, and college attendance.

### **Research Question**

The following research question guided this phenomenological research: In middle school and high school, what do 18-24-year-old African American male college students recall learning about college preparation, college planning, and college attendance?

### **Conceptual Framework**

This phenomenological study was conducted using critical race theory (CRT). CRT is used to advocate for underserved populations, to make social change, and to promote the well-being of humanity (Benton & Craib, 1996). Using CRT guided the study toward empowering these 18–24-year-old African American male college students, helping them recognize any restraints that may have been placed on them.

According to Delgado and Stefancic (2001), CRT originated in the mid-1970s when activists recognized the decline of the Civil Rights Movement and decided to change the relationship between race, racism, and power. The major themes associated with CRT include (a) racism for people of color; (b) the White race dominating people of color; and (c) society stereotyping people of color regarding their intelligence and moral behavior. Therefore, educators, scholars, writers, and activists used the three themes to advocate for victims of racism and economic oppression in an effort to bring about a social change. CRT has been the basis for many qualitative studies of racial minorities in educational settings. Educators have used CRT to teach both the hidden and foreseen negative impact of racism on minority students (Carter, 2008).

CRT is important to this study because it will allow the researcher to provide a better understanding of issues related to the marginalized group: African American male youth. Using CRT provides a theoretical basis for examining the influences of racism on African American male students (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). In addition, CRT



corresponds to the chosen questions used to develop this study. It is expected to reveal how outside factors, such as oppression, racism, or SES, prevent students from attending or completing college. CRT will be explained in depth in Chapter 2.

### **Nature of the Study**

A phenomenological study was the methodology for this study in order to add depth to the study and allow participants to participate in their natural environment (Creswell, 2007). I chose a phenomenological design because I wanted to describe the lived experiences of 18–24-year-old African American male college students regarding the knowledge they received in middle and high school about postsecondary education. A phenomenological study allowed participants to describe their experiences; it also gave voice to a marginalized group.

### **Method**

I used a phenomenological study to describe what seven 18-24-year-old African American male college students recalled from middle school and high school about college preparation, college planning, and college attendance. After interviewing seven participants, I established themes that reflected on their lived experiences. From the data, possible barriers that prevented African American students from attending college were discovered; also discovered were the students' perspectives of any inequalities, challenges, and/or stereotypes associated with their educational journey. Next, I told the lived history of these African American students, including their struggles with equality, oppression, and stereotypes that they have experienced in regards to their education, in

addition to other areas. I concluded by exploring the implications for counselors and counselor educators about the findings, specifically in the area of college preparatory programs in middle school and possible programs for African American students that would enhance their college readiness.

Data were collected from 18–24-year-old African American college students. I served as the key instrument for collecting data by conducting interviews with each participant. I immersed myself in the African American culture in order to be able to describe their lived experiences, that is, when they were in middle school and high school and were—or were not—presented with information about college preparation, college planning, and college attendance. I analyzed the data by entering it into NVIVO. I then coded it. I identified statements that highlighted participants' lived experiences to create clusters or themes. Then I used the themes to write a description of their lived experiences, including what they experienced and how they experienced it.

### **Definitions of Key Terms**

*College culture-* Educators create an environment in middle and high school that exposes students for postsecondary education. College cultures are usually created in diverse high schools where students are at risk of not graduating from high school. College culture environments are designed to strengthen students' writing skills and inform them about college opportunities and schedule college visits (Radcliffe & Stephens, 2010).

*College preparatory programs*- Programs with a rigorous curriculum that starts preparing students for college in middle school. Students take college-bound courses and are well informed about college opportunities.

*College readiness*- The preparation students need that includes a rigorous curriculum, which prepares them for a postsecondary institution. Students take college courses starting in middle school and continuing through high school (Leonard, 2013).

*Environmental factors*- Any factors or distractions that influence human behavior. Environmental factors discussed in this study include poverty, parental educational level, family SES background, and first-generation graduates.

*Ethnicity*- Ethnicity refers to a connectedness based on commonalities in which cultural patterns are shared. Equity is often used interchangeably with race.

*GEAR UP* (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs): Refers to a comprehensive program designed to prepare low-income students and their families for college *GPA* (grade point average): Refers to the point system educational institutes use to average students' overall grades in school.

*Informed Consent*- A form used to secure agreement from individuals who volunteer to participate in a study. The form includes information that explains the purpose of the study, benefits, and risks of the study (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008).

*IRB* (International Review Board): Refers to a group of people who review plans for research involving human subjects. They protect the rights and welfare of people involved in research.

*Marginalized groups*- A group of people rejected by society based on gender, education, culture, ethnicity, race, or economic status.

*Multicultural competence*- It is when counselors approach the counseling process from various perspectives. Counselors provide services to accommodate the culture of the client (Ahmed, Wilson, Harrison, & Jones, 2011).

*SIS* (Student Information System): Refers to the web-based system school districts and other affiliates use to acquire students' information and create collaborate environments for parents.

### **Assumptions**

- A primary assumption in conducting this research study was that using a qualitative method was the best approach. Since I sought to explain and understand a social problem that groups might experience, a qualitative approach would work better (Creswell, 2009).
- It was assumed that the qualitative approach was best because I anticipated acquiring a lot of data to support the topic: was to describe what 18-24-year-old African American male college students recalled from middle school and

high school about college preparation, college planning, and college attendance.

- I assumed that conducting a qualitative study would produce in-depth information about a marginalized group that needs to be heard. Even though programs exist at middle and high schools, it appears that there is still something the African American male students are not being exposed to that limits their future college attendance.
- I assumed that I would submerge myself into the lives of the participants and provide results that would make a social change.
- I built rapport and established relationships with participants to help solidify the study by showing empathy toward, and understanding of, the participants without judgment (Patton, 2002).
- Even though I work in the surrounding area where the participants attend college, I assumed that building rapport and establishing positive relationships with them would not create a problem. Building rapport and establishing positive relationships with participants increases the chances that they will be truthful when answering interview questions. I assumed the participants would be truthful because no consequences existed for untrue responses.
- In addition, I assumed that the data collection process would run smoothly and participants would respond to all interview questions and follow-up sessions, if needed, because the potential for conducting follow-up sessions was stated during the interview.

- Finally, I assumed that participants would not share information with their friends and/or colleagues because confidentiality was expected and was reviewed throughout the interview.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The research study described what 18-24-year-old African American male college students recalled from middle school and high school about college preparation, college planning, and college attendance. The study included only African American male students from a Midwestern college or university. Neither White students, students of other ethnicities, nor students living outside of the Midwest were included.

Only African American students participated in this study. I chose African American males because of the discrepancies between the educational experience of European American students and African American students; as well as the educational experience between African American male students and female students. The majority of the population in the area was African American and previous research revealed a vast difference in graduation rates between African American and European American students (Cokley, McClain, Jones, & Johnson, 2011). I chose African American male students because school personnel stereotyped and marginalized them more than African American female students (2011). This study had the potential to provide results that can benefit other races and genders that experience inequality during their educational journey as well.

### **Limitations**

Using participants from a marginalized group posed limitations to the study.

African American male college students are a vulnerable population. The International Review Board (IRB) allows researchers to focus on one ethnic group, but a clear rationale for excluding other ethnic groups is needed. My rationale for choosing African American male college students involved the future of current middle and high school students. The findings from this study might reveal barriers that could interfere with them pursuing a college degree. The results of this study might highlight successful pathways to college for current African American male middle school and high school students.

Research already exists showing a major gap in college attendance between the African American ethnic group and other ethnic groups. In part, a reason for the gap is related to social economic status. Educational attainment is directly related to income. Disparities in the higher education system exists. In fact, according to Naylor, Wyatt-Nichol, and Brown (2015), African Americans are less likely to graduate from college because of poverty. They reported that 24% of African Americans between the ages of 18 and 64 live in poverty. Living in poverty decreases students' chances of going to college and earning a degree. In contrast, White students continue to enroll in college at a higher rate than do African American students (Owens, Lacey, Rawls, & Holbert-Quince. 2010). According to Graves (2010), less than 8% of Black males between the ages of 15 and 29 are college graduates compared with 17% of White males and 35% of Asian males. In fact, in 2013 the college enrollment for Black males is 4.5%, which is the same

as it was in 1976 (Scott, Taylor, & Palmer, 2013). Specifically, 22.5% of the White population, 25 years and older, earned a baccalaureate degree; only 13.7% of the Black population, 25 years and older, earned a baccalaureate degree (Naylor, Wyatt-Nichol, & Brown, 2015). More specifically, 22.3% of White males earned a baccalaureate degree whereas only 12.9% of Black males earned a baccalaureate degree (Naylor, Wyatt-Nichol, & Brown, 2015). Therefore, considering the above statistics show Black students always drastically behind White students, it was not difficult justifying why I chose one ethnic group opposed to the other.

A possible limitation to the study involved quality; therefore, I ensured the study showed quality. I provided quality for the study by making sure the questions showed validity. I interviewed each participant to enhance the quality, because allowing assistants to conduct interviews may pose a potential threat to the quality of my study (Creswell, 2007). Additionally, I provided clarity for each question to ensure each participant understood and knew the meaning. I reflected on the interviews to secure the quality of the information, because waiting too long may have caused me to forget something or make guesses, which could have caused a threat to the quality of the data. I ensured the findings made sense by recording verbatim answers from different participants. Finally, I hand-coded the data and identified statements that highlighted participants' lived experiences to create clusters or themes. Then I used the themes to write a description of their lived experiences, including what and how they experienced them.



In addition, I solicited feedback from participants to enhance validity for the study. Several strategies to ensure quality exist for researchers to use in the actual study. Maxwell (2005) explained different types of threats to validity and ways to eliminate the threats. Maxwell (2005) suggested researchers explain any possible biases that may affect the study as well as how he or she will deal with it to reduce any threats to validity. To eliminate research bias, I included a section in my study explaining any possible bias that might interfere with the study. In addition, I used triangulation to collect data from diverse participants. Next, I participated in the study with intensive long-term involvement. Maxwell (2005) explained long-term participant involvement and repeated interviews provide more data that are complex; therefore, I used this strategy to increase validity. Then, I included rich, detailed, and varied data to provide a full and revealing understanding of the study. I conducted 7 interviews with participants, allowing them to explain in detail their lived experiences of when they were in middle and high school. “Receiving feedback will rule out the potential of misunderstanding what participants said, their perspective, as well as identifying my own biases and misunderstandings of what I observed” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 111). Therefore, I solicited feedback from participants to secure validation.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is unique because the results of the study can educate middle school and high school counselors about their students’ needs. After counselors and educators understand the importance of preparing African American males at young ages, they

could improve their counseling programs to provide more applicable services for them. Then counselors can address each component proactively in the following ways. Counselors can use this study as data to help support the need for new and enhanced programs, such as AVID, college culture programs that allow college visits and school-work mentorship programs for young African American male students. Additionally, the results from this study may help counselors petition school boards, principals and/or district personnel about changing school counseling curriculum, specifically programs that are aimed at enhancing college preparation programs for young middle school African American students. It can provide evidence of how poorly African American middle school students are prepared for college. Administrators need to see supportive data in order to make changes to a traditional curriculum. Finally, this study can enlighten legislators and district administrators about the need for a change in counseling curriculum accommodating at-risk populations.

This study will contribute to existing literature because I provided an opportunity for a marginalized group to speak out and share the messages they received or did not receive in their everyday school experience regarding college and secondary school attendance; as well as acknowledge barriers that might have impede their academic success. This study may help counselors and school personnel to understand more clearly the everyday barriers that interfere with their learning. As an African American female school counselor, I have witnessed male students being categorized into groups, especially categories of failure. In fact, I heard a teacher tell a student, in the front of his peers, that based on the way he was acting, he would never graduate from high school. Of

course, the student is from a home whereas the mother is raising him alone and does not participate in school activities, but the teacher should not place labels on students. For this reason and many others, this study is important so African American male college students can share their lived experiences of when they were in middle and high school. The educational system helped me to progress in life; therefore, I want to give back to the communities where I know I can make a difference in marginalized students' lives. I plan for my research to make a difference in so many lives. In addition, I want my research to help strengthen the counseling profession.

This study will help many people. I targeted the educational audience, meaning superintendents, legislators, school board members, principals, district personnel, and parents. I will provide a copy of my dissertation to any of the above interested stakeholders and seek to present my dissertation at state and national conferences. In addition, I will submit my dissertation for publication in various counseling journals associated with the American Counseling Association (ACA). My study could help parents, too. Parents will learn how to help their children at home as well as learn how to prepare their children for college. Parents provide essential support for students; therefore, educating parents about college readiness accomplish a major milestone in relation to underprivileged students' college preparedness. Overall, my goal is for this study to provide African American male students with the same educational opportunities in regards to college preparation as other students receive. Finally, I hope administrators acknowledge my research and see the urgency for social change in middle and high schools.

### **Implications for Social Change**

Research provides data that can influence social change and counselors possess the resources to be social change agents. In a taped interview (Laureate Education, Inc., 2009) Dr. Laura Lynn explained that researchers have a huge impact on social change because researchers inform policy and practice, get information to practitioners so he or she can use the information to change the work they do and really make a difference in people's lives. Research findings can change lives in so many different areas. In a taped interview (Laureate Education, Inc., 2009) Dr. Kowalczyk referred to researchers as "planting seeds in people's minds" because the seeds will blossom, just like people begin to make a change after exposure to research. According to Dr. Serdyukov, social change is creating a better world, which leads to a better society (Laureate Education, Inc., 2009).

I see myself as a social change agent because my study helped me become a social change agent for many students. According to Lee (1998) "a counselor who is a social change agent possesses the awareness, knowledge, and skills to intervene at a system-wide level" (p. 9). I hold these qualities, and I will intervene at the district and state educational levels to help students become college-ready graduates. I based my research on helping children from underprivileged communities overcome barriers; negative connotations and stereotypes associated with them; build self-esteem and self-confidence; and develop empowerment to embrace any obstacles they encounter. Which in return, will help build a better society. Finally, my study contributed to research that

already exists, and I hope it will attract the right people's attention to bring about social change.

Counselors possess the resources to be social change agents. The intended outcome of this study was to provide an evidence basis for school counselors to create social change in inner-city African American students' lives by helping them overcome negative connotations and stereotypes, overcome barriers and challenges, build self-esteem and self-confidence, and develop empowerment to embrace any obstacles they encounter. As a result, the intended outcome would help build a better society. Finally, creating a social change for African Americans can provide a pathway for them to follow regarding college attendance, achieving their goals, and making appropriate career choices.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I introduced the need for this study to occur. I provided research that supports the need for postsecondary education planning to begin in middle school. In addition, this chapter included statistics and data that showed a myriad difference between African American male students and White students in regards to academics, standardized test scores, and college attendance. Finally, I explained how the results from this study will help counselors see the need for adaptations to their counseling programs; as well as the need for district personnel to revisit their curriculum in middle school and high school in regards to preparing African American males for college. This study provided an opportunity for the voices of a marginalized group to be heard.

In Chapter 2 I provide a detailed literature review. For example, I discuss the theoretical framework, court cases, and students' perceptions. Equally important, I built upon the literature review by discussing the history of segregation and desegregation for African Americans in regards to education inequality. I discussed famous court cases regarding segregation and desegregation in educational settings, as well as a racial profile situation that resulted in a teenager's death. Finally, I concluded with discussing students' perceptions of their educational journey; which included their perceptions of all involved in their education and potential barriers that prevent them from academic success and college attendance.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

A problem exists because African American male students aspire to attend college, but they are not being prepared for several reasons including; lack of resources, environmental factors, location of their middle and high schools, and their lack of knowledge about college preparation. In the paragraphs to follow, researchers shared the following: African American students are not being prepared for college, the high school dropout rate is higher in African American students, and the barriers African American students experience during their educational journey. Researchers have rarely consulted with students, which has caused a gap in the literature. The purpose of this research will be discussed next.

The purpose of this study was to describe what 18-24-year-old African American male college students recalled from middle school and high school about college preparation, college planning, and college attendance. Seven African American male college students ages 18–24, who meet the required criteria, shared their lived experiences during their middle school and high school years regarding information they received about college preparation, college planning, and college attendance. Quantitative research showing a problem in regards to the lack of college preparation and attendance among African American youth exists (Storz, 2008). However, qualitative studies that describe American male college students lived experiences in middle school and high school regarding college preparation, college planning, and college attendance is lacking.

Therefore, this phenomenological study described the lived experiences of Midwestern 18–24-year-old African American male students lived experiences of college preparation during middle school and high school.

The study provided an opportunity for a marginalized group to speak out and share their experiences; it also acknowledged barriers that impede this group's academic success. Participants shared what they experienced in middle and high school that did or did not encourage college preparation, college planning, and college attendance. A phenomenological design was used to develop a composite description of pathways to college that African American male college students experience.

African American students' low scores on the (NAEP) led Radcliffe and Stephens (2010) to explore whether counselors and teachers adequately prepare students for college. Additionally, Blustein, et al. (2010) found that African American students experienced higher risks of dropping out of high school, thereby not advancing into college. As well, Radcliffe and Stephens (2008) provided details of how African American students receive poor preparation for a higher educational experience, creating a gap in college preparation between them and White students.

Not only does a gap in college preparation between Black students and White students exist, but a gap in college preparation between males and females exists, too. Graves (2010) and Cokley, McClain, Jones, and Johnson (2011) noted the following: a vast difference exists between African American male students' and African American female students' academic excellence, high school completion, and college attendance;



African American male students develop negative attitudes towards education, school environments, and their teachers more than female students; African American male students receive more punishments, suspensions, and expulsions than African American female students; African American male students are placed in special education classes more than African American female students; and parents have lower academic expectations for African American male students than African American female students.

African American students need adequate college preparation in high school so they can attend college and learn how to succeed in college. Carter (2008) explained that African American students realize how racism affects them in school as well as post-graduation when they try to find a job. Carter found that African Americans understand that earning a college degree makes a difference in their lives; because having a college degree is the only way they have a chance at making a decent salary, becoming financially stable, and increasing their social status. Additionally, African Americans aspire to graduate from college to serve as role models for their children and other African American students. Most importantly, they want to earn a college degree to break the stereotype associated with African Americans not going to college post-graduation. In fact, African American students realize that even with a degree, chances become dismal in the job market because most interviews are conducted by a European American male or female. Students emphasized that even with a college degree, they struggle with securing professional jobs; but without an education, professional jobs become nothing but a distant dream.

A problem for African American students includes not receiving adequate preparation for postsecondary education and the workforce. Several researchers explored the following topics, which affect African American students' lack of preparation for secondary education: contributing factors and barriers (Timmermans & Booker, 2006; Cabrera et al., 2006; Gibbons & Borders, 2010; Turner & Conkel, 2010); parental educational level (Dubow, Boxer, & Huesmann, 2009; Steinmayr, Dinger, & Spinath, 2010; Raty, & Kasanen, 2010); existing programs (Cadeau, 2011; Timmermans & Booker, 2006; Radcliffe & Stephens, 2008, 2010); stereotypes (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Warner & Phelps, 2008; Blustein et al., 2010); and lack of influential helpers (Fenzel & Domingues, 2009; Cadeau, 2011; Savitz-Romer & Bouffard, 2012; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). This literature review was organized to demonstrate the breadth of research on different aspects of those youths' experiences in relation to college preparation and provide a foundation of knowledge for this phenomenological study. A large amount of existing literature related to African Americans and inadequate college preparation produced common themes. These themes, included barriers and outside factors, parental educational level, lack of programs, lack of influential helpers, and stereotypes.

Timmermans and Booker (2006) reported how outside factors such as poverty affect college attendance for students, especially African American students. Cabrera et al. (2006) discussed contributing factors preventing African American students from attending college to include parental educational level, their families' social economic status background (SES), and being the first generation in their family to attend college. Research shows that parents' educational level predicts the educational success their

children will experience (Dubow, Boxer, and Huesmann, 2009; Steinmayr, Dinger, & Spinath, 2010; Raty & Kasanen, 2010). Family background influence children's decision to pursue postsecondary education (Raty & Kasanen, 2010). Parental educational levels affect the interactions that occur within families. When low or negative family interactions exist, children become more aggressive and experience behavior issues (2009). Because of the negative behavior and aggression, children have less academic success. They are punished for their negative behavior in school, which leads to conflicting relationships with their teachers and negative attitudes about school. Parents with higher levels of education inspire their children to set high aspirations for academic success and their children set high expectations for themselves (2009).

Cokley, McClain, Jones, and Johnson (2011) reported that African American males have more of a negative attitude and behave differently towards their teachers than female students. Graves (2010) explained that by third grade, parents have higher expectations for African American females than they do for African American males. Students from low SES backgrounds were found to receive less academic and social support, which reduces their chances of enrolling in a postsecondary institute (Cabrera et al., 2006). Gibbons and Borders (2010) found that many African American adolescents plan to attend college; but outside factors such as barriers and weak family support prevented them from achieving their goals. Influential leaders in African American low-income students' lives, however, were found to make a difference in preparing them for college. Based on their findings, Gibbons and Borders (2010) asserted that parents need to work together to prepare African American male students for college.

Finally, Hilgendorf (2012) conducted three qualitative case studies of low-income elementary African American boys to show different perspectives of the support they receive regarding their education. Hilgendorf (2012) examined the African American males' support network to understand where they received school related support. However, Hilgendorf (2012) did not find a consensus of where African American male students receive their support. Students, parents, and school personnel shared different perspectives of where students receive school-related support. In summary, Hilgendorf (2012) concluded educators need to strengthen the support system and set goals that benefit both the schools and families.

By providing an in-depth literature review, I demonstrated both the gap in current research on the topic of 18–24-year-old African American male students' experiences in middle school and high school about information they received regarding postsecondary education and the clear need for this phenomenological study in filling this gap. Researchers have rarely consulted with students, which has caused a gap in the literature. Therefore, the purpose of this phenomenological study, to describe what 18-24-year-old African American male college students recalled from middle school and high school about college preparation, college planning, and college attendance, will herein become evident. The literature review ends with an explanation of the literature related to the methodology for this study.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

To identify prospective, peer-reviewed articles and books, the following databases were searched: EBSCO, PsycARTICLES, PsyINFO, and SocINDEX. I used Boolean operators, AND and OR to optimize the results. Abstracts were used to judge an article's relevancy to the research questions. The references of significant articles were scanned for additional sources. Key terms used to search for the literature included: *African American at-risk youth, at-risk youth, at-risk middle school students, Black adolescents, rural African American youth, first-generation college students, first-generation college students and parents, African American students and parents and education, African American male students and parents and education, parent education and student achievement, middle school counseling, middle school counseling for African Americans, middle school counseling in inner cities, middle school and African Americans and college preparation, middle school and counseling and African Americans college preparation for middle school African American students, African Americans and middle school and college, urban middle school students, urban students in middle school, middle school counselors, middle school students and higher education, middle school students' perception of college, teachers' perceptions and academic achievement, college readiness, African American and teachers and relationships, African American students and teachers and problems, African American students and perceptions and school, , students and counselors and relationships, young adults and college, case study and qualitative and African Americans, critical race theory and African Americans, critical*

*race theory and African Americans and college preparation, high school dropouts and African American students and United States.*

The strategy for searching databases included locating research on African American's awareness and college preparation, as well as recent students related to the research problem. I read the abstracts to determine if the article included relevant key points. If I found pertinent information, I read the article looking for common themes. I placed each article in a file for future references and continued the search for more articles. Next, I broadened the search by choosing a multidisciplinary database, Academic Search Complete. Using Academic Search Complete, I advanced the search by providing the option of choosing several databases containing articles related to the study. I used ERIC, PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, and SocINDEX databases, which provided a plethora of articles from various journals revealing inner-city African American students' perspectives of college preparation they receive at school. In addition to peer-reviewed articles, Gibbons and Borders (2010), Radcliffe and Stephens (2008) represent a few researchers who conducted research similar to this study.

The topics *African American* and *college preparation* produced 81 results [aka "hits"], so I changed the search to *African American students and college attendance*, receiving only 42 results. I continued to narrow the search by using different topics. Lastly, I searched the Walden Library for Walden Dissertations, using the topic *African American students and college*. The search produced 44 dissertations, but only seven shared commonalities with my topic.

### **Theoretical Framework**

I designed this phenomenological study based on critical race theory (CRT), which focuses on advocating for underserved populations, making social change, and promoting the well-being of humanity (Benton & Craib, 1996). As Delgado and Stefancic (2001) described, “CRT movement is a collection of activists and scholar interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power” (p. 2). The movement originated in the mid-1970s when activists such as Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and Richard Delgado recognized the decline of the Civil Rights Movement. CRT is based on three broad themes:

- Racism is an ordinary everyday experience for most people of color in the United States.
- The system conforms to White over color.
- Race and races are products of social thought and relations, causing society to overlook people of color’s intelligence and moral behavior; instead stereotyping them with “pseudo-permanent” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 8) characteristics.

Educators, scholars, writers, and activists use the three themes to advocate for victims of racism and economic oppression in an effort to bring about a social change. Importantly, CRT has been a lens for multiple qualitative studies of racial minorities in secondary and post-secondary academic settings. CRT is a theoretical approach used in educational settings to address the hidden and foreseen negative impact racism has on

minority students (Carter, 2008). Educators use CRT for a better understanding of issues related to the fairness of standardized tests, for school discipline with students of color, to evaluate the education quality that students of color receive, and to teach students history regarding the struggles of racism people of color overcame in the past and continue to battle in the present (Carter, 2008).

Education researchers have used CRT in several studies, revealing how racism and economic oppression affect people. African Americans possess a critical race consciousness, which means they know because of their race, they will encounter educational and life challenges (Carter, 2008). African Americans live in a society where society members perceive them as subordinate to other races; additionally, African American citizens also earn the least amount of money in society and perform academically low in school (Carter, 2008). African American children and adults struggle daily to overcome the stereotypes placed upon them due to the color of their skin.

Carter (2008) used CRT as an analytical framework to identify factors that affect African American students' academic success; as well as provided an insight of African American students' perceptions towards race and racism pertaining to their academic achievement. Carter (2008) explained how racial identity affected African American students' self-concepts, attitudes, and beliefs toward education. Carter's (2008) study included 20 (13 females and 7 males) urban high school students located in the Midwest of the United States. Carter (2008) used the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity Scale plus an interview protocol to make a qualitative inquiry of students' responses to



how they view themselves as racial beings. Students with positive self-concept were found to have higher academic achievement; whereas, students with low self-concept about racial identity yielded to the negativity and stereotypes associated with African Americans; resulting in poor academic performance. However, in some cases, racial adversity motivated African American students to work harder in their academics to break the stereotypes placed upon them (Carter, 2008). Many African American youths aspire to attend college, but their dreams fail to become reality because they are not equipped with adequate academic, social, and emotional support necessary for a successful college career (Carter, 2008).

Carter (2008) concluded that implementing a critical race consciousness can be helpful to African American students in pursuing their academic and life goals. Carter's (2008) findings indicate African American students are aware of racism and know how racism can dampen their self-identity. They realized that students who are aware of societal racism disengage from doing well in their academics and form negative attitudes toward school. Therefore, African American students chose to remain strong, maintain positive feelings about their racial group, and create bonds with other African American students to achieve their goals of maintaining good grades and attending college. Despite the adversity they might experience, they must work hard to succeed academically in high school, go to college, graduate from college, and secure a professional job to help break the stereotypes associated with the African American race.

Several researchers use CRT as a theoretical framework for their studies.

Unattended biases exist in public schools, which affect the vulnerable populations. Based on CRT, Grover (2010) explored how racism affects students of color's success in a Utah public junior high school, addressing the factors that affected their academic experience. He wanted to understand students' perspectives of racism at their school. Predominantly White students attend the junior high school, with only 19% minority students to make up the student body. Grover (2010) used the Power School Student Information System (SIS) to choose 30 students to conduct interviews and observations. He coded data according to specific categories to explore the connection to CRT. After the interviews and observations, Grover (2010) noticed that students of color had positive and negative experiences at school, that their cultural background played a critical role in their daily lives, that racism was significantly manifested at the school, and that a division existed between different ethnic groups. From the observations and interviews, Grover (2010) concluded that social change needs to happen to address racial inequalities existing at the school. Educators need to self-assess and identify ways of how racial inequality can be addressed opposed to searching outside the schools for answers.

In addition to the CRT studies conducted by Carter (2008) and Grover (2010), Henfield and Washington (2012) used CRT as a theoretical framework to analyze White teachers' perceptions of their experiences working in a predominantly White school where the African American population was continuing to increase. As Henfield and Washington (2012) explained, during the 2010-2011 school year, 45% of all students in American public schools were identified as minority students; but 83% of all teachers

were White. Considering the wide gap in statistics, questions arose to whether teachers can effectively educate African American students. To add to existing literature, Henfield and Washington (2012) conducted a qualitative study to examine teachers' perception of their experiences in a predominant White middle school with a growing African American population. Henfield and Washington (2012) used a critical theoretical lens to examine race and make connections between racial influence and African American students' academic success.

The study consisted of focus-group interviews with 26 White middle school teachers that included 19 females and 7 males. Henfield and Washington (2012) found that teachers submit to deficit thinking, which is the belief that someone lacks intellect to function in society. Deficit thinking exists heavily with teachers working in urban low SES schools. In regards to their deficit thinking, teachers lowered expectations for minority students by modifying the curriculum and eliminating assignments and/or required readings. In addition, teachers stereotyped minority students' academic failure to non-traditional home environments. Overall, teachers lacked cultural competency, which affected the way they communicated with and taught African American students.

Results from the study conducted by Henfield and Washington (2012) indicated that teachers know a problem exists, but do not properly contextualize the problem or know how to fix it. Teachers know the importance of developing positive rapport and relationships with African American students, but many were found to lack skills or knowledge to understand culturally and racially diverse students. With the deficiencies,

teachers were unable to engage African American students. Based on the results from the study, Henfield and Washington (2012) explained how teachers recognized the need for them to receive multicultural professional development to enhance their effectiveness with African American students, which in return might enhance African American students' academic performance. "In order for Black students to be academically successful, they must be taught by multicultural competent teachers" (Henfield & Washington, 2012, p. 159).

In a similar study, Radcliffe and Stephens (2008) used CRT as the theoretical framework to examine the role racism plays in the shaping of schools, schooling practices, and African American students' perceptions of attending college. Radcliffe and Stephens (2008) identified that creating college cultures increased African American students' awareness of college opportunities, as well as empowered them with positive self-concept and self-esteem.

Radcliffe and Stephens (2008) launched a seven-year, longitudinal quasi-experimental study with 100 at-risk African American 6<sup>th</sup> grade students to show the effects implementing a college culture program has on them. In addition to students, other participants included preservice teachers, parents, and an English professor. Radcliffe and Stephens (2008) based the study on the Creating a College Culture Project, which was designed to create a college culture among at-risk diverse adolescents who may never graduate from high school. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), only 49% of African American students graduate from

high school. Therefore, Radcliffe and Stephens (2008) investigated how creating a college culture using four components: mentoring, technology, college campus visits, and parental involvement impact at-risk African American middle school students' aspirations to attend college. They collected data by using surveys, interviews, reflective statements, and student academic performance measures; and analyzed data with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Findings from the study revealed that, after a college culture experience, students' perceptions about college became more positive and they became more excited about attending college.

In addition to the college culture experience, parental involvement helped to change students' perception towards college, too. Parents are major influences in their child's educational journey. Parental involvement improves students' academic achievements and increases the percentage of high school graduates (Radcliffe & Stephens, 2008). However, regardless the ambition some parents have to help their children with college preparation, they lack the necessary skills, understanding, knowledge, and resources needed to help make college attendance a reality for their children (2008). Because of these inabilities, Radcliffe and Stephens (2008) found that African American parents rely on teachers and counselors to provide resources and guidance for their children. Therefore, school personnel must collaborate with parents and establish positive relationships to enhance African American students' academic achievement. For example, Radcliffe and Stephens (2008) explained how counselors hosted college information nights and sent home pamphlets to educate parents about college opportunities. Providing parents with information about college admission and

financial aid helped them develop a better understanding of college. As a result, more parents supported counseling programs and encouraged their children to attend college (Radcliffe & Stephens, 2008). Radcliffe and Stephens (2008) concluded that with the proper academic encouragement and support from the school and their parents, African American students could begin in middle school envisioning and setting goals for college attendance.

The purpose of this study was to describe what 18-24-year-old African American male college students recalled from middle school and high school about college preparation, college planning, and college attendance. Common themes found in the above studies included outside factors, barriers, and weak family support. In addition, these studies highlighted the results of racism, inequality, and oppression, which correspond with the purpose of this study. Existing research show a connection between CRT and the racism that African Americans experience in educational settings. In addition, the chosen question for this study builds upon existing research and will demonstrate relevance to CRT in similar ways. What the present study did differently, however, was it allowed the voices of marginalized students to project so they can contribute to ending the social injustice existing in public schools.

I chose CRT for this study because CRT allows researchers to provide a better understanding of issues related to marginalized populations. Midwestern inner-city 18–24-year-old African American male students represent a marginalized group with a voice that needs hearing. Therefore, using CRT provided a theoretical foundation for

examining the influences of racism on inner-city African American students (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). The goals for this study included making a social change, advocating for the underserved population, and promoting the well-being of humanity (Benton & Craib, 1996); which includes many themes associated with CRT. CRT theory posits that African American middle school students know restraints are placed upon them regarding college preparation. Therefore, using CRT as a framework, this study explored 18–24-year-old African American male college students lived experiences during middle and high school years regarding information they received or did not receive regarding college preparation, college planning, and college attendance. Additionally, using CRT as a framework revealed how outside factors such as oppression, racism, or SES prevent students from attending college. Issues of segregation and desegregation related to African American students trying to acquire an education, an example of racial profiling, and African American male middle school students' perceptions of their educational journey; which includes their perceptions of all involved in their education and potential barriers that prevent them from academic success and college attendance will be discussed further.

The remaining literature review was organized in the following manner: a history of segregation and desegregation with a focus on court cases; the achievement gap for African American students, highlighting student perceived barriers and teachers' perceptions; students' perceptions of environmental factors including their teachers and counselors, as well as accessible programs; and a summary of everything discussed in chapter two.

## **A History of Segregation and Desegregation**

For hundreds of years, African Americans have fought for equal rights in the United States. Segregation, historically, has been a factor that has contributed to the inequalities, discrimination, and marginalization that African American people experience in their neighborhoods, communities, and schools. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Civil Rights leaders advocated for African American citizens, trying to provide equal opportunities and end segregation (Goldsmith, 2009). However, currently in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, African Americans still live in segregated and dilapidated neighborhoods, encounter educational challenges, and continue to experience segregation and racism (Goldsmith, 2009). Living in segregated neighborhoods has been found to affect children academically, socially, and emotionally; which as a result restricts their life chances of success (Niles & Peck, 2008).

### **Court Cases**

For years, segregation in schools has been the foundation for several court cases. A long history of advocates trying to desegregate American schools and other public places exists. This section of the literature review provides a history of court cases related to segregation, starting with the Plessy v. Ferguson decision of 1896 and continuing through the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> amendments to the United States Constitution were written to prohibit slavery and guarantee the same rights to all United States citizens (Balkin & Levinson, 2012). However, many states, including Louisiana, failed to acknowledge and



abide by each amendment. In 1896, Homer Adolph Plessy advocated for the rights of African Americans by sitting in the White's only section of a railway car (Kinshasa, 2006). As a result of sitting in the White's only section, Plessy was arrested, convicted, and sentenced to pay a \$25 fine. Plessy advocated for African Americans' rights regarding the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> amendments, but continued to receive rejections from the courts. Plessy's case, known as *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) resulted in a Supreme Court decision to uphold state laws requiring racial segregation in public places regarding the *separate but equal doctrine* (Kinshasa, 2006). The courts continued to uphold the *separate but equal doctrine*, acknowledging that it was legal for Whites and African Americans to be separate as long as facilities were of equal quality (Kinshasa, 2006). In spite of Plessy's efforts, African Americans still experienced oppression and segregation in public places. In fact, after the *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) court case, some southern states' government officials refused to provide equal facilities and opportunities for African Americans (Kinshasa, 2006). The Jim Crow laws continued to exist, allowing educational facilities and public institutions to discriminate against African Americans.

Segregation existed in higher educational institutes as well. Berea College, which is located in Kentucky, was founded in 1855. It was the only desegregated higher-level learning institute in southern United States in the 1850s that allowed African American and White students to attend classes together (Day et al., 2013). However, in 1904, Kentucky legislators passed the Day Law, which prohibited any educational facility from teaching African American and White students in the same school if classrooms for each race were less than 25 miles apart (Day et al., 2013). Considering that Berea College was

a private institute, college officials challenged the Day Law, but the Supreme Court supported the state's decision regarding the Day Law and perpetuated racial prejudice. Therefore, the Day Law legalized the segregation of Kentucky classrooms throughout the state, making it illegal for African American and White students to attend the same school. Once again, the Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) case surfaced; with the Supreme Court extending the *separate but equal doctrine* to include higher-level learning institutes (Caldas & Bankston, 2007). The law remained effective until the nullification by the United States Supreme Court decision in Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas (1954).

The Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas (1954) court case was a social movement that brought about a social change in the United States, not only for schools, but for other areas as well. The Brown v. board of Education of Topeka, Kansas (1954) case brought social and legal reforms for females, persons with disabilities, members of religious minorities, and many more areas (Minow, 2013). Important in this study is the reform of educational institutions. The Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas (1954) originated from a pastor who recognized racial segregation still existed. Rev. Brown advocated against the Kansas segregation law of keeping African American children separate from White children's schools when his daughter, Linda Brown wanted to attend an all-white school (Caldas & Bankston, 2007). The famous Brown v. Board of Education (1954) case evolved to provide equal educational opportunities for children, regardless of their racial background (Caldas & Bankston, 2007). Prior to the Brown v. Board of Education, African American children could not

attend public schools with White children. *Brown v. Board of Education* defended that race should not be a reason to prevent children from attending schools within their district where they lived (Caldas & Bankston, 2007). Rev. Brown advocated against the Kansas segregation law of keeping African American children separate from White children's schools. The *Brown v. Board of Education* and other Civil Rights movements brought attention to segregation, which resulted in desegregation for many parts of the United States. Nonetheless, racial segregation in public schools continues to be a pervasive problem for African American youth.

In spite of the gains made by the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision toward ending segregation in schools, problems still persisted. In Montgomery, Alabama, for example, African Americans still received unfair treatment and experienced racial issues (Kinshasa, 2007). In 1955, Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a bus to a White man, which led to her arrest (Kinshasa, 2007). Because of Rosa Parks' arrest, the Montgomery, Alabama Bus Boycott of 1955 began. African Americans refused to ride city buses to protest against segregated seating (Kinshasa, 2007). The protest lasted for nearly a year, resulting in the eventual integration of Montgomery's bus systems.

During the same year, 1955, a racial profile situation occurred in Mississippi that affected all of the United States. Emmett Till, a 14-year old African American from Chicago, Illinois went to Money, Mississippi to visit his family, unaware of the Jim Crow laws and extreme racism that existed in the South (Anderson, 2008). Emmett allegedly whistled at and flirted with a White woman behind the counter of a local grocery store

(Anderson, 2008). A few days later, the woman's husband and half-brother stormed into Emmett's house, took him away, and brutally murdered him (Anderson, 2008). Emmett's mother wanted everyone to see the cruelty of racism and its existence in the United States, so she allowed his casket to remain open for viewing. Emmett's death brought attention to how racism still existed in the United States.

In 1957, the federal government became involved in a public-school segregation issue in Little Rock, Arkansas. The governor of Arkansas failed to abide by the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling regarding nine African American students searching for equality by wanting to attend a previously all White, Central High School (Little Rock, 2012). White supremacists refused to let the nine African American students enter the school, so the National Guard had to escort the students into the school to ensure their safety (Little Rock, 2012).

In 1959, Virginians defied the desegregation ruling, too. As Caldas and Bankston (2007) described, "The Virginia Assembly passed legislation authorizing the closing of any school that allowed Blacks and Whites to attend together" (p. 225). As a result, the Prince Edwards County School Board shut down the school system for five years rather than allow African American and White children attend the same school (Caldas & Bankston, 2007). During the five-year school system shut down, White children continued to receive an education. Caldas and Bankston (2007) reported that a private group, The Prince Edward School Foundation, funded the operation of a private school for White children only. In contrast, African American students went without any formal

education during the 5-year school system shut down. The school district did not reopen until 1964 when the Griffin ruling outlawed the closing of schools to avoid desegregation.

Desegregation continued throughout the 1960s and brought change for African American children (Kenty-Drane, 2009). In fact, Caldas and Bankston (2007) explained that the 1960s became a time in which freedom of choice existed. Many schools became desegregated and students could choose the school where they wanted to attend. Legally, African American students could attend the school of their choice, even with White students, but racial tension still existed (Caldas & Bankston, 2007). Racial tension was exasperated by the practice of school officials' assignment of students to schools based on the student's geographical location. This practice, which separated students based on their geographical location, perpetuated segregation due to the fact that communities remained segregated. African American students lived in different neighborhoods than White students and they each attended the schools within their neighborhoods. Even into the present day, many African American students attend segregated schools (Parris, Owens, Johnson, Grbevski & Holbent-Quince, 2010).

Not only did the 1960s bring about educational changes, but other changes for African Americans originated as well. In 1960, John F. Kennedy issued Executive Order 10925, which started affirmative action in employment, compensation, and promotion of all persons without regard to race (Smith, 2005). Because of the Executive Order 10925, the government contractors formed the Committee on Equal Employment to ensure

everyone complied with the order (Smith, 2005). Four years later, the United States Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 allowed advocates to help end segregation (Caldas & Bankston, 2007). The Act also empowered advocates to enforce racial desegregation in public places and help end discrimination in public places. In addition, The Act allowed the federal court to withhold federal funding from schools that discriminated based on race, religion, or national origin (Caldas & Bankston, 2007).

In 2000, a Children's Defense Fund report showed many school districts in the United States still showed as much segregation in 2000 as they did in 1954, at the time of the Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court decision to end segregation (Parris, Owens, Johnson, Grbevski, & Holbent-Quince, 2010). Goldsmith (2009) reported that 72% of African American students attended schools where more than half of the student population represents non-White students. The unity that once existed between Civil Rights leaders and policy makers during the 20<sup>th</sup> century have dissipated because policy makers place less attention on school desegregation requirements (Goldsmith, 2009). As a result, African American students continue to attend segregated schools and experience many of the same inequalities students experienced in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including lack of resources, high teacher turnover, and inadequate college preparation. As Kenty-Drane (2009) explained, African American students attending integrated schools experience better educational opportunities due to advanced resources, high expectations set by teachers, and high academic achievement that all lead to students' greater occupational aspirations.

## **Illinois**

Desegregation officially ended in Illinois in the 1960s, but neighborhood segregation and educational inequality still exists 50 years later. The next section explains the lived experiences of African Americans in the state of Illinois. Illinois has a history of African Americans fighting for equality in neighborhoods and in school districts. In fact, segregation has continued to exist in one of the most highly African American populated city in the United States, Chicago, Illinois (Danns, 2008).

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, during the Great Migration, African Americans from Southern parts of the United States flooded Chicago in search of equality (Danns, 2008). Although racism was not as severe in the North and Midwest as it was in the South, segregation and racism still existed. African Americans could only live in certain parts of Chicago, which resulted in segregated neighborhoods and schools. The government sponsored segregated schools; therefore, school officials chose specific sites for African American students to go to school (Danns, 2011). The schools were located in segregated neighborhoods, with White faculty; and the students felt intimidated by the facility and educational services they received (Danns, 2011). Advocates began to fight for African American students regarding educational equality. The United States Department of Health Education and Welfare (HEW) became involved in Chicago, IL (Danns, 2011). HEW developed guidelines for school districts to adhere to in order to receive federal funding. The guidelines established by (HEW) required school

administrators to show evidence of desegregation plans they implemented in order to end racial segregation in schools (Danns, 2011).

In 1961, The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) discovered that the Chicago Public School District continued to allow racial segregation within the school system, even in neighborhoods where segregation was possible. Therefore, Civil Rights groups initiated a plan called Operation Transfer, which involved transferring 160 African American students into surrounding White schools (Danns, 2011). District administrators would not approve the plan, so as result of the unapproved plan, a group of advocates sued the school district in the 1963 case, Webb v. the Board of Education of the city of Chicago (Danns, 2011). The case was thrown out of court but resulted in the Houser Report, which revealed the segregation problem in Chicago; including the fact that only 10% of Chicago schools were integrated (Danns, 2011). The Hauser Report of 1964 included recommendations for Chicago's administrators to desegregate schools, but administrators still did not follow the recommendations. As a result, Civil Rights leaders formed a group called, Coordinating Council of Community Organizations (CCCCO). The CCCCOC formed boycotts against segregated schools in order to draw attention to the lack of desegregation and the poor-quality education the African American students experienced in Chicago's public schools. Highlighted areas included overcrowded classrooms, inexperienced teachers, insufficient books, and scarce supplies (Danns, 2011). The issue became a federal case, making national news. Eventually, the government released over \$32 million to start a Chicago public school fund for improved schools (Danns, 2011).



In 1968, Chicago school districts bused African American students to certain White neighborhood schools to maintain the new desegregation laws (Danns, 2011). Controversy and conflicts arose, but with support from parents, concerned citizens, and the new school superintendent, plans were implemented to desegregate 34 Chicago schools (Danns, 2011). Desegregation laws allowed African Americans to attend integrated schools, yet they still experienced inequality regarding their education. Between 1981 and 1986, Chicago successfully desegregated the majority of White schools (Danns, 2011).

Chicago public schools continue to honor the desegregation laws, but segregation is still an issue. Using results from a demographic survey, Danns (2008) explained how Chicago schools are even more segregated today than they were 40 years ago. As Danns (2008) explained, “In 1968, 42.2% of the public city schools’ population was White; but in the 2007-2008 school year, 8.0% of the population was White and 46.5% of the population was Black” (p. 74). To conclude, African American students in Chicago Public Schools are more likely to attend a segregated school today, in 2015, than they would have been in the 1970s.

### **The Achievement Gap for African American Students**

Many studies document the achievement gap that exists between African American students and White students. For example, African American students score lower on tests and have lower grade point averages (GPA) than White students; White students show a higher school readiness rate than African American students; and African

American students are less likely to attend college than White students (Whaley & Noel, 2012). African American students' underachievement in school is related to continued segregation of schools and the inequity of resources. The academic achievement gap between African American and White students affects African American students in various ways, placing them at a high risk of dropping out of school (Leah & Williams, 2007). In addition, the academic achievement gap affects their perspectives of the education system, of attending college, and of completing college. As a result, the high dropout rate continues to spread across the United States. Finn and Chasin (2007) reported that one-third of all high school students drop out of school, and the odds increase about 50% for African-American students. Students who do not feel like they belong and do not participate in classroom activities have low self-concept and low self-esteem. As a result, they drop out of high school. Therefore, at-risk students and contributing factors need recognition early so educators can implement interventions to prevent students from dropping out of high school (Barry & Reschly, 2012). In fact, Roach (2009) suggested counselors and teachers could help reduce high school dropout rates among African American students by identifying vulnerable students in elementary school, and continue working with them through high school.

Finn and Chasin (2007) reported that the escalated dropout rate does not totally refer to students' poor achievement; instead, students drop out of high school due to boredom, lack of motivation and support from home or school, and poor preparation from teachers, counselors, and administrators. To explore Finn and Chasin's (2007)

assertion further, the following sections of the literature review provide studies by other researchers to support their assertion.

### **Student Perceived Barriers**

Inner-city African American students aspire to attend college, but outside factors and barriers often prevent their aspirations from becoming realities. They encounter environmental factors and barriers including lack of academic preparation, lack of college information, lack of adult and peer support, low self-confidence, lack of motivation, gender and ethnic discrimination, fear of leaving home, and lack of money or financial support (Turner & Conkel, 2010). Low SES is also a contributing barrier for many African American students. Overall, poverty affects the chances for African American students continuing a postsecondary education (Timmermans & Booker, 2006). Students with low SES showed lower academic achievement because they do not know about the college bound curriculum and fail to take college bound courses, which in return prevents them from setting goals for attending college (Cabrera, Deil-Amen, Prabhu, Terenzini, Lee, & Franklin, 2006). As a result, the environmental factors and barriers inner-city African American students encounter contribute to the low high school graduation rate of only 50%. The studies that follow clearly indicate that inner-city African American students need help with developing skills to overcome existing barriers that prevent them from succeeding academically and being college ready.

Inequalities regarding career development exist in the American education system. Research shows inner-city youth often have lower levels of educational

attainment, experience only a 50% chance of graduating from high school, and face a greater risk of unemployment post high school (Turner & Conkel, 2010). Employed minorities received low-paying jobs based on their SES and education. Therefore, researchers concluded that there is a need that exists for counselors to implement career education in inner-city schools that would include preparation for college and exploration of career options for students.

Turner and Conkel (2010) used stratified random sampling to conduct a quantitative study showing how students who learn certain developmental skills increase self-confidence and motivation to succeed academically. The study consisted of 142 multiethnic seventh and eighth grade inner-city students, 28% of whom were African American. Turner and Conkel (2010) used the Integrative Contextual Model of Career Development (ICM) to help inner-city minorities overcome career barriers and educate them about different career opportunities. ICM helped students self-assess and identify their career skills. The ICM showed success in helping middle school students identify vocational interests and high school students identify career paths they wanted to pursue (Turner & Conkel, 2010). However, sometimes barriers prevented students from achieving their career goals. These barriers are discussed below.

Turner and Conkel (2010) used the ICM model to understand how using an intervention increased students' career development skills and career outcomes development. In the study, Turner and Conkel (2010) examined the effectiveness of a career counseling intervention, based on ICM and compared it with a traditional career

counseling model. The study included a control group of students who received no career counseling. In regards to identifying career barriers, Turner and Conkel (2010) measured career barriers using a pre-and posttest of the Perceptions of Barriers Scale (POB); which is a 28-item self-report inventory pre-and posttest used to measure career barriers.

Students took the inventory test, the (POB) to measure existing barriers in their lives.

Students identified some of the barriers to include lack of academic preparation, lack of adult support from home, lack of peer support, and gender/ethnic discrimination (Turner & Conkel, 2010). After collecting data, Turner and Conkel (2010) concluded that prior to the posttest, adolescents who participated in the ICM activities reported greater career readiness skills than did participants who did not complete any career development activities. The authors' study adds to existing literature that demonstrates the need for career development interventions to help African American adolescents choose career paths. In addition, students who received interventions via the ICM successfully modeled skills that were used to overcome educational barriers.

In addition to students recognizing barriers that prevented them from academic success, they make a connection between educational inequalities that existed in their schools and how the inequalities negatively affected their education. Storz (2008) contributed to existing literature by conducting interviews with 250 6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> grade students living in an urban Midwestern area. Storz (2008) used phenomenological research to explore urban middle school students' beliefs and perspectives about the quality of their education.

The following paragraph includes some of the themes Storz (2008) discovered from interviews with the students. Students recognized that inequalities existed, such as having a nonchallenging curriculum, poorly qualified teachers, low teacher-retention rate, no positive student-teacher relationship, no respect from teachers, and teachers who used few supportive resources when teaching (Storz, 2008). In addition, several students indicated that they believed teachers only come to school for their paychecks. In comparison, students reported that they saw a difference between the education they were receiving and the education students received at a nearby school. Students shared that at the nearby suburban schools; teachers that are more qualified were hired, more resources were available, and teachers used an updated curriculum to challenge their students (Storz, 2008).

Therefore, to change students' perceptions, Storz (2008) recommended that teachers needed to self-assess and focus on the inequalities and biases existing in their classrooms. Equally important, teachers needed to develop positive rapport to treat students with respect, and to maintain high expectations for all students. Helping students set achievable goals, and encouraging students to work hard were also shown to be important for students' college readiness (Storz, 2008).

Students know that inequalities affected their learning experience and prevented them from achieving academic success. As Storz (2008) explained, "Disappointed and dismayed, urban African American middle school students struggle to understand what they perceive to be an unequal and unfair system" (p. 262). Students wanted to be

academically challenged, but recognized the fact their schools lacked appropriate resources needed to prepare them for college. Therefore, their aspirations and goals become nothing more than a distant dream. Storz's (2008) study provides an insight for educators to hear the voices of inner-city African American students and understand their perspectives regarding educational inequalities with the intent of then making a social change.

### **Teachers' Perceptions**

The school environment also has affected the outcome of students' success. Students do not need to encounter more issues when coming to school to earn an education (Roberts, 2010). Therefore, Roberts (2010) stated that teachers, counselors, and administrators needed to ensure all students receive equal treatment and feel welcomed at school each day, building a positive school environment, which would enrich student learning. Roberts (2010) found that students had the potential to excel in schools with strong leadership, highly qualified teachers, sophisticated technology, and rigorous curriculum. A friendly, warm, and compassionate classroom environment needed to coexist to ensure students' academic success occurs. In particular, African American students need a positive-caring classroom environment to enhance their chances of a productive academic career (Roberts, 2010).

Roberts (2010) conducted a phenomenological study to explore eight African American teachers' perspectives and care for their African American students in a southeastern city school where 96% of the students are African American. For the study,

Roberts (2010) used CRT as a theoretical framework to examine how race and racism exist in schools. Each teacher participated in interviews to discuss their caring behavior toward African American students. From the interviews, Roberts (2010) developed emergent themes; but focused on two important themes, which included political clarity and concern for students' future. The teachers explained how they talked with students, educating them about racism and the effects it has on their education. Teachers acknowledged that a need exists for them to prepare African American students on how to combat racism. In addition, teachers shared how they established positive relationships with their students, because students needed positive teacher-student relationships to enhance academic achievement (Roberts, 2010). Teachers explained how they shared with the students the importance of portraying positive images, completing high school, and earning a college degree.

After interviewing each teacher, Roberts (2010) concluded that teachers are aware of the need to establish positive teacher-student relationships. They acknowledged that teachers who develop caring relationships with their students enhanced the chances for students to experience success in academics. Roberts (2010) concluded that school climate affects students' academic achievement. Additionally, the teachers acknowledged that African American students need to receive different care and attention than traditional European students receive (Roberts, 2010). To conclude, Roberts (2010) study adds depth to existing literature regarding the care in moral education. Each teacher's story might be used to better inform pre-service teachers on the importance of developing positive teacher-student relationships.



African American students struggle daily to overcome the barriers and challenges they experience. In spite of all the existing programs, (e.g. Title I, Headstart, and Success for All), to help African American students succeed, they still struggle to survive in public schools (Roberts, 2010). As a result, many African American students give up on academic achievement and drop out of high school. Evidence shows that policy makers and school administrators need to assess existing programs, policies, and procedures, and make necessary changes to help African American students experience academic success (Roberts, 2010).

One suggestion from the literature about how to make changes in the African American student's experience in school is to hire more minority teachers. Students might converse more and/or relate more to teachers who share their same culture (Douglas, Lewis, Douglas, Scott, & Garrison, 2008). In urban schools, minorities make up most of the school population, but educators and administrators are predominantly White (Douglas, et al., 2008). A racial imbalance exists between students and staff, because according to Douglas et al. (2008), 87% of the teachers in the United States are White, and 8% are African Americans. In fact, during the 2010-2011 school year, 45.1% of all students in America attending public K-12 schools represented minority students, and 82.9% of the teachers were White (Henfield & Washington, 2012). In spite of the low statistics of minority teacher representation, African American students go to school, and try to earn an education from teachers representing a different culture than their own. Sometimes the results are not positive because African American students fail to develop relationships with teachers from a different culture that results in low academic

performance, inadequate college preparation, and an increase in the high school dropout rate (Douglas et al., 2008).

Many White teachers have been found to lack personal experience with diverse students prior to a classroom setting because they did not receive appropriate training to teach diverse students (Henfield & Washington, 2012). Teachers often acknowledge their lack of cultural competence to connect with and effectively educate African American students. Henfield and Washington (2012) suggested that district administrators ensure all employees receive multicultural training to provide a better education to all students. To increase the chances of academic success for African American students, they need to receive a qualified education from multicultural competent teachers (Henfield & Washington, 2012).

Certainly, White teachers show compassion towards their students, but sometimes personal bias or preconceived ideas might interfere with professional obligations regarding showing respect and fairness towards all students. In fact, Douglas et al. (2008) explained how White teachers fail to accommodate African American students' needs because they prejudge African American students and have lower expectations for them. White teachers might also show a lack of respect for their families and the African American culture. Teachers who fail to accommodate African American students and do not respect their culture contribute to African American students' inability to experience academic success (Douglas et al., 2008).

Another contributing factor to African American students performing lower in academics refers to the school system failing to accommodate their needs. In American public schools, educators teach to the traditional European American culture characteristics, focusing on individualism and competition; whereas African American students learn via collectivism and cooperation (Rust, Jackson, Ponterotto, & Blumberg, 2010). While a White student may thrive in a culture of individualism and competition, many African American students are at a loss for how to act due to the cultural differences in values. Therefore, teachers need to be cognizant of their biases and the differing cultural values that their students may possess.

Instead of teachers entering the classroom with an open mind, teachers often bring pre-conceived stereotypes, judgmental attitudes, and past experiences into the classrooms that influence how they treat students (Douglas et al., 2008). As a result, White teachers' attitudes towards African American students may be affected. Douglas et al. (2008) found that when teachers fail to address their own prejudice and biases, the educational needs of African American students are not met. As educators, teachers can address the educational needs of all students without showing bias, neglect, or reservations towards anyone. To do this, teachers need to take time out and get to know their students, their backgrounds, their distinctive qualities, and enjoy them as individuals. Douglas et al. (2008) explained, "Generalization applies in many cases, but certainly not in all cases" (p. 58); therefore, teachers need to respect each student as individuals and not as groups. Overall, the time has come for teachers to take an active role in closing the academic

achievement gap between African American students and White students. Closing the gap will provide African American students equality regarding academic success.

A necessary part of helping to close the academic achievement gap between African American students and White students is a change in how teachers perceive their students. Kenyatta (2012) found that teachers' perceptions of African American students set the tone for any classroom or school environment. The manner in which teachers interacted with students influenced how African American students viewed schools and academics. Teachers represent an important link between African American students' success and failure. Roberts (2010) aforementioned study revealed that students' academic success increased when they believed their teachers cared for them and their academic future.

Teachers' perceptions of students sometimes have been found to interfere with their teaching abilities. Kenyatta (2012) explained how teachers' perceptions are often influenced by stereotypes and personal bias, therefore causing them to treat students differently based on their ethnicity or socioeconomic background. However, some teachers fail to realize how their perceptions play a role in students' academic achievement, and how these perceptions can strengthen or weaken a student's self-esteem (Kenyatta, 2012). Teachers who set high expectations for their students inspired them to strive harder towards their goals and succeed academically (Kenyatta, 2012). In addition, teachers' behavior and attitude towards African American students affected their academic performance. Several factors contributed to why teachers treat students

differently. Teachers prejudged students' ability based on their SES and race (Kenyatta, 2012). As a result, teachers concluded that African American students from low SES showed laziness and performed lower in academics than non-minority students (Kenyatta, 2012). Eventually, students recognized that teachers had biases and contributed to their own academic struggle.

Another factor contributing to African American students' academic success or failure associated with their teachers' perceptions includes labels. African American students receive labels as early as elementary school (Kenyatta, 2012). One label African American students receive pertains to their academic ability level. A portion of student placement includes teacher judgment. Teachers have been found to underestimate African American students' academic ability and make student placements based on this underestimation of their ability (Kenyatta, 2012). African American students are disproportionately placed in low-level classes and in special education classes. Teachers' misjudgments place African American students at a disadvantage and often miss the opportunity to take college preparatory classes and are not ready for college (2012).

Additionally, teachers' perceptions of African American males cause them to show bias in classroom discipline (Kenyatta, 2012). In fact, teachers contribute to the high suspension rate for African American male students in several studies (2012). "Evidence from numerous school districts indicated that, even when African American male students represent a small percentage of the school population, they still account for the most school suspensions" (Kenyatta, 2012, p. 39). Eventually, African American

male students yield to the bias, stereotypes, and inequity they receive and start believing they cannot learn or succeed academically (2012). To summarize the effect of the ongoing inequities and bias that African American students experience, a 2010 report from the School Foundation on Public Education (SFPE) revealed the national graduation rate for African American males during the 2007-2008 school year was 47% (2012). In comparison, the graduation rate for White students was 78% (Education, 2010). Data such as this demonstrates the need to raise awareness for the need for action to be taken to increase the graduation rate for African American students, especially African American male students.

To summarize, teachers' perceptions strongly affect African American students' academic success. Students can easily be persuaded in the wrong direction when they believe their teachers do not support them. Kenyatta (2012) reported that even students with positive attitudes about academics weakened when teachers showed little to no support or compassion for their academic success. To make a change in the way teachers perceive African American students, Kenyatta (2012) suggested teachers attend training to become more cognizant of students' social and academic needs. Teachers who understand and respect students' culture will create a positive learning environment for all students.

## **Students' Perceptions of Environmental Factors**

### **Teachers**

Students sense how their teachers perceive them and the expectations teachers set for them. Specifically, African American students in predominantly White schools experience isolation, hostility, and unfair treatment by school staff and students, which affects their academic performance (Watkins & Aber, 2009). Blustein et al. (2010), for example, conducted a qualitative narrative, examining 32 urban high school students' (59% female, 41% male) concept about the connection between schoolwork and how racism affects their future. They used developmental and career theory as a framework because middle and high school students experience cognitive, social, and emotional developmental changes.

Blustein et al. (2010) contributed to existing literature by conducting interviews with students, providing more data to support how racism affects career development. The interview questions focused on students' racial, cultural, and ethnical background and their opinion about whether their academic status will affect their future success. After analyzing the data and finding common themes, Blustein et al.'s (2010) results revealed that students show awareness of racial inequalities and recognize how racism affects them in various ways. They recognized the connection between doing well in school and achieving career goals but lacked the support of how to achieve those goals. Finally, students shared that they were aware that society had low expectations for them based on their racial, cultural, and ethnic background. African American students,

however, did not know how to overcome racial barriers to make a social change involving racism. Therefore, the responsibility lies with counselors, educators, and parents to unite and advocate for a social change in urban African American youths' academic journey.

As previously noted in Robert's (2010) phenomenological study, students' academic success depended on their school environment, defined as the school climate that often has to do with teachers' expectations. In addition, school environment also includes the relationship teachers build with their students. Positive teacher-student relationships and student awareness of their teachers' concern enhances their academic success (Roberts, 2010). In a similar study, Pringle, Lyons, and Booker (2010) found that teachers could help bridge the gap between African American students' academic success and failure. In the qualitative study, Pringle, Lyons, and Booker (2010) sought to understand African American students' perceptions of the effects teacher expectations have on their academic achievement. Participants included all African American graduating seniors from two Southeast high schools. One high school's population included 91.9% White and 8.1% minority, which included 3.2% African American students (2010). The other high school's population included 27.9% White and 72.1% minority, which included 27.9% African American students, 21.8% Hispanic students, and 22.4% Other Minorities (2010). However, participants for the study included 10 African American senior students out of 307 from the predominately White populated school; and 38 African American students out of 134 from the predominately minority school (2010).



Pringle, Lyons, and Booker (2010) collected data by asking open-ended questions and conducting on-going interviews with each senior for the duration of three months. Their findings revealed that over one-half of the interviewed African American students believed race and/or ethnicity was a factor in the way their teachers treated them. Some of their teachers showed bias because the teachers had low expectations for African American students and did not expect high quality work from African American students compared to what they expected from their White students. In addition, African American students were discouraged from taking advanced or honors classes (2010). Pringle, Lyons, and Booker's (2010) study support previous research in regards to how teacher expectations strongly influenced students' academic success.

To conclude, studies reviewed above demonstrate that African American students are aware of the bias that teachers have against them. In particular, African American students who fail often do not have a sense of belonging to the school (Pringle, Lyons, & Booker, 2010). Most importantly, Pringle, Lyon, and Booker (2010) explained the importance of African American students needing to believe their teachers care about them because building a positive teacher-student relationship is an essential component of their academic success.

### **Counselors**

African American female students realize that counselors exist in their schools, but some students have different perceptions of their counselors. Professional school counselors receive special training that allows them to provide the following services to

students: psychological, social, and emotional support; academic and career advice; and serve as advocates to support students' needs (Owens, Stewart, & Bryant, 2011). In addition, counselors build trusting relationships with students so they feel comfortable discussing personal issues. However, not all African American students perceive counselors as someone they can confide in or trust (Owens, Stewart, & Bryant, 2011).

Owens, Stewart, & Bryant (2011) conducted a qualitative study to explore African American girls' perceptions and experiences with their school counselors. Participants included 10 African American Midwestern 10<sup>th</sup> grade girls who came from single-parent homes. The authors conducted 30-minute interviews with each participant to explore their perception, attitude, and experiences with their school counselor. After analyzing the data, Owens, Stewart, and Bryant (2011) found seven often contradicting themes. Some students perceived counselors as very helpful and someone they could build trusting relationships with, while others perceived counselors as someone that was too busy and not accessible, not trustworthy with personal information, and judgmental (Owens, Stewart, & Bryant, 2011).

All participants knew school counselors existed in their buildings, but some had negative perceptions. Students realized that counselors assisted with career development processes and with college information, but some students were reluctant to confide in their counselors with personal information (Owens, Stewart, & Bryant, 2011). Therefore, Owens, Stewart, and Bryant (2011) concluded that counselors needed to build positive counselor-student relationships so students, especially African American students, felt

comfortable talking with them. Considering how African American students hesitated to seek counseling, the responsibility lies within school counselors to take an active role in reaching out to their students (2011).

Counselors who built positive relationships with students influenced their high school career. Students valued the opinion counselors developed of them. Therefore, “school counselors must be aware of the cultural influences on the lives of African American female adolescents and their own unique role in students’ positive development” (Owens, Stewart, & Bryant, 2011, p. 38). African American students reported experiences of racism and discrimination in their schools, therefore, school counselors need to develop strategies to eliminate the possibility of students thinking it might exist in their counseling relationship (2011). Most of the students from the study indicated they shared positive relationships with their counselors, and they found their counselors helpful (2011). In spite of students finding counselors helpful, they suggested ways of how counselors might enhance the student-counselor relationship. Students indicated they want to see more culturally appropriate programs that would accommodate their needs and interests; as well as school counselors entering the relationship with a clear mind and no preconceived opinions (2011). Students wanted counselors to be fair and get to know them so they could avoid any stigmatization (2011).

In a longitudinal study, Trusty, Niles, and Carney (2005) used career theory as a framework to compile data from other researchers and explored the importance of counselors not only helping African American students prepare for college, but also

teaching them how to maintain college responsibilities necessary for college completion. In fact, Trusty, Niles, and Carney (2005) found that students who participated in an education-career planning program made plans to attend college. Over three decades, the percent of high school students planning to pursue college degrees and professional occupations increased. In 2000, 66% of female high school graduates entered college immediately after high school (2005). Implementing the educational-career planning and career counseling provided a plethora of benefits for students, but Trusty, Niles, and Carney (2005) found that the teachers, administrators, students, parents, and counselors had to collaborate to make the plan successful. Middle school counselors were also found to be influential in helping students choose appropriate career paths.

Choosing appropriate career paths mean counselors conferencing with students and helping them develop individualized plans accommodating their specific needs, goals, challenges, or abilities (Trusty, Niles, & Carney, 2005). Counselors start by ensuring students take appropriate classes necessary for college acceptance. To support their reasoning for choosing each class, Trusty, Niles, and Carney (2005) reported that counselors used data from classrooms performance, test assessments, and career-interest inventory tests. After counselors helped students choose classes appropriate for their abilities and goals, they worked with students to develop autonomy and self-regulation skills (2005). Teaching students how to develop autonomy and self-regulation prepared the students for independence, which is a college readiness skill (2005).

In summary, Trusty, Niles, and Carney (2005) concluded that when counselors implemented effective education-career planning systems early in a student's academic career, students started to think about careers of interest and started to develop career goals and plans. Collaborative efforts from parents, teachers, and administrators allowed counselors the opportunity to develop an effective education-career planning system for students (2005). Equally important, students in the study also experienced personal growth such as a more positive self-concept, more self-awareness, better decision-making skills, and attitudes that are more positive when counselor implemented career theory (2005).

### **Programs**

For years, several companies and agencies, including private organizations and state-and-federal-level agencies, have implemented various college preparatory programs in urban middle schools in anticipation of social change (Cabrera et al., 2006). In fact, "billions of dollars are spent on American education each year to ensure students receive an appropriate education in grades K-12" (Huerta et al., 2013, p. 25). However, most programs focus on specific elements, but fail to focus on the targeted groups of students who do not attend college. In fact, Cabrera et al. (2006) reported that only 25% of college preparatory programs targeted the at-risk population (e.g. low-income, first generation, and historically underrepresented groups). In spite of all the implemented programs, low-income students' level of preparation for college and college attendance rates remain below those of students from a higher SES (Cabrera et al., 2006). Certainly, a gap exists

between the effectiveness of the programs and students' college readiness. To explore this gap, Cabrera et al. (2006) used cultural and social capital as a conceptual framework to evaluate a program, determining its effectiveness when implemented in low-income middle schools. "The Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP), is a comprehensive program intended to enable nearly one million low-income middle school students and their families to learn about, plan for, and prepare for college inside and outside of school" (Cabrera et al., 2006, p. 82) GEAR UP is designed to be implemented in 6<sup>th</sup> grade and continues through high school, tracking students' progress in math and reading.

Cabrera et al.'s (2006) longitudinal study included 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> graders from California public low-income schools. To show the effectiveness of GEAR UP, Cabrera et al. (2006) used the Standardized Testing and Reporting, STAR, system and California's Academic Performance Index, API, to collect students' math and ELA data from 6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade. Students did not receive GEAR UP interventions in grade six so researchers could measure the effectiveness of the program. Cabrera et al. (2006) used a multilevel design to examine the effectiveness of implementing GEAR UP. Cabrera et al. (2006) reported positive results from implementing the GEAR UP program. Sixth through eighth grade students' reading and math scores and skills improved significantly. By the end of seventh grade, students had increased their reading scores by 21.3 points (2006). By the end of eighth grade, all students displayed a significant gain of 30.5 points compared to their sixth-grade scores (2006). Similar improvements occurred in math as well. By the end of seventh grade, students increased their math scores by 21.4 points (2006). By the

end of eighth grade, all students showed a gain of 24.7 points compared to their sixth-grade scores (2006). In addition to academic improvements, low-income middle school students who participated in the GEAR UP program increased their college readiness level, as measured by the Stanford-9Test, and more students aspired to attend college (2006). GEAR UP appears to hold the promise of being able to overcome some of the challenges that African American students encounter that affect college attendance.

Several other college preparatory programs begin in middle school and continue through high school. In addition to the GEAR UP program, AVID is a program that begins preparing students for college in middle school to increase their college awareness. AVID is a program designed to prepare the underrepresented students for college. “AVID begins as early as 6<sup>th</sup> grade and provides an elective class that focuses on writing, inquiry, collaboration, and reading strategies that support students in their quest to take rigorous college preparation classes” (Huerta et al. Huerta et al., 2012, p. 27). Research indicates that students who begin the AVID and GEAR UP programs in middle school excel in high school performance, graduate from high school, and transition into a higher learning institution (Huerta et al., 2013). The more middle school students are actively engaged in college preparatory activities, the more prepared they are for high school and college (Huerta et al., 2013).

Wimberly and Noeth (2005) conducted a study regarding the ACT Policy Report summary of sixth through eighth grade students. The study builds on previous policy reports and provides data to support the reasoning for college preparatory programs to

begin as early as sixth grade. Part of the study involved researchers surveying 263 students, representing 15 schools in urban and suburban school districts, to examine what effect of early exploration and planning in certain college readiness areas had on students. Additionally, the researchers explored how people and school-based factors helped students set goals and develop a postsecondary plan. The discussion groups' results indicated that low-income middle school students aspire to attend college, but their school programs fail to prepare them. Seventy-eight percent of middle school students indicated they had begun to think about going to college, yet only 66% of the students described their school program as college preparatory (2005). Results indicated middle school students do not receive a college preparatory curriculum designed to help them develop the skills necessary for college attendance. The study found that teachers, counselors, administrators, and parents did not collaborate or implement effective programs that would help students acquire skills and knowledge necessary to attend a postsecondary institute. However, Wimberly and Noeth (2005) asserted that when counselors, parents, educators, and community members do collaborate to establish effective programs for students, college readiness become a reality for African American students.

### **Summary**

The literature review section provided a comprehensive review of literature related to this study. Considering race was a dominant theme, critical race theory was the foundation for the study. The review began with a review of the historical context of the



issue of segregation and desegregation. The effects of racism, stereotypes, and inequality on the college preparation that African American students receive were reviewed. The literature review presented a discussion about the challenges that inner-city African American middle school students encounter regarding college readiness. A plethora of literature exists explaining the importance of counselors implementing college preparatory programs in middle school and providing programs for African American students to help make them college ready. In addition, the literature demonstrated that African American middle school students currently do not appear to be receiving adequate preparation for a postsecondary education. African American students aspired to attend college, but lack support, guidance, and resources to make their dreams come true. Many studies were found that explored programs that are available for African American middle school students regarding college preparation, and explained barriers that African American students encountered when pursuing a postsecondary education. However, a dearth of qualitative studies exists, which would allow 18–24-year-old African American male students share their lived experiences in middle and high school about information they received regarding postsecondary education.

This present study examined seven 18–24-year-old African American male college students lived experiences of when they were in middle school and high school, regarding college preparation, college planning, and college attendance. A gap between inner-city Black students' educational experience and White students' educational experience still exists. This study allowed the above marginalized group to have a voice and to create a narrative, which might more adequately describe African American

youth's experiences and barriers to attending higher education institutes. In Chapter 3, I explain the details about the type of research design and its importance. In addition, I explain the role of the researcher, data collection methods, data analysis procedures, and ways to increase the validity of the study.

## Chapter 3: Research Design

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to describe what 18-24-year-old African American male college students recalled from middle school and high school about college preparation, college planning, and college attendance. There is quantitative research showing a problem in regards to the lack of college preparation and college attendance among African American youth exists. (Storz, 2008). However, qualitative studies that describe the lived experiences of 18–24-year-old African American male college students during middle school and high school regarding college preparation, college planning, and college attendance is lacking. Therefore, this phenomenological study described the lived experiences of 18–24-year-old Midwestern African American male students and their lived experiences of college preparation during middle school and high school.

The study provided an opportunity for a marginalized group to speak out and share their experiences; as well as acknowledge barriers that impeded their academic success. A phenomenological design was used to develop a composite description of the pathway to college that African American male college students experienced. Participants shared what they experienced in middle and high school that did or did not encourage college preparation, college planning, and college attendance. The research design used in this study was qualitative, and the research approach was phenomenology.

I explored the lives of seven, 18–24-year-old African American male college students via in-depth interviews. From the interviews, I established themes to explain

their lived experiences during their middle school and high school years regarding information they received about college preparation, college planning, and college attendance. From the data, potential barriers were discovered, ones that prevent African American students from attending college; as well as developing contributing factors that enable them to go to college. In addition, students shared their lived experiences of any inequalities, challenges, and/or stereotypes associated with their educational journey. Next, I explored the history of these African American students, including the struggles with equality, oppression, and stereotypes that they have all experienced in regards to their education and other areas. Finally, I concluded that by exploring the implications for teachers, counselors and counselor educators concerning the findings, specifically in the area of college preparatory programs in middle school and potential programs for African American students that will enhance their college readiness.

## **Research Design and Rationale**

### **Restatement of Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this phenomenological study research:

1. What are the experiences of African American male college students between the ages of 18–24 regarding college preparation, college planning, and college attendance when they were in middle school and high school?
2. What experiences in middle school and high school do African American male college students identify as being influential to their decision to attend college?

3. What are the characteristics of a successful pathway to college amongst African American male students?

### **Rational for Research Questions**

I developed these questions to coincide with the guidelines of a phenomenological study approach. Each question was a working guideline and a foundation to initiate the conversation with participants. I hope these questions allowed participants the opportunity to expand on each question and share additional information that supported the study. The open-ended questions allowed participants to incorporate into their answers or that of any other information they considered important about their experience in middle and high school that encouraged or did not encourage their decision to attend college. Finally, I chose the above questions because each question helped me address the key issue of a marginalized group, and central themes emerged from participants' responses (Creswell, 2009). It is common for research questions to change during interviews, therefore I will let the participants' responses determine where the questions end.

I chose the phenomenological study design because it best fits the topic and chosen questions. The phenomenological study design best fits the research because my goal aligned with the definition for a phenomenological study. "Phenomenological research is when the researcher explores the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants" (Creswell, 2009, p. 13). Phenomenological researchers spend extensive amounts of time in the field interviewing participants, coding

data, creating clusters or themes, and analyzing data, to write a description of participants lived experiences. In this study, I only used interviews as a data collection method.

Several researchers use phenomenology as their design to explore the lives of groups who experience disparity in their lives. Roberts (2010) conducted a phenomenological study to explore eight African American teachers' perspectives and care for their African American students in a southeastern city school where 96% of the students are African American. Each teacher participated in interviews to discuss their caring behavior toward African American students. The teachers explained how they talked with students, educating them about racism and the effects it has on their education. Teachers acknowledged that a need exists for them to prepare African American students on how to combat racism. Roberts (2010) concluded that teachers are aware of the need to establish positive teacher-student relationships. They acknowledged that teachers who develop caring relationships with their students enhanced the chances for students to experience success in academics. In addition, Roberts found that school climate affects students' academic achievement. Additionally, the teachers acknowledged that African American students need to receive different care and attention than traditional European students receive (Roberts, 2010).

In a similar study, Pringle, Lyons, and Booker (2010) found that teachers could help bridge the gap between African American students' academic success and failure. Pringle, Lyons, and Booker sought to understand African American students' perceptions of the effects teacher expectations have on their academic achievement. Participants

included all African American graduating seniors from two Southeast high schools. Participants for the study included 10 African American senior students out of 307 from a predominately White populated school; and 38 African American students out of 134 from a predominately minority school (2010). The researchers collected data by asking open-ended questions and conducting on-going interviews with each senior for the duration of three months. Their findings revealed that over one-half of the interviewed African American students believed race and/or ethnicity was a factor in the way their teachers treated them. Some of their teachers showed bias because the teachers had low expectations for African American students and did not expect high quality work from African American students compared to what they expected from their White students. In addition, African American students were discouraged from taking advanced or honors classes (2010). Pringle, Lyons, and Booker's (2010) study support previous research in regards to how teacher expectations strongly influenced students' academic success.

The need for this phenomenological study was evidenced by the gap in the literature related to the absence of researchers conducting studies that share 18–24-year-old African American male college students' experiences in middle school and high school about information they received regarding postsecondary education. For example, by the time students reach eighth grade, over 80% set goals to attend college (Wimberly & Noeth, 2005), but many inner-city students never achieve their goals for several reasons, including lack of resources and knowledge about college preparation. In fact, the NAEP reported that only small percentages of eighth graders score proficient on standardized tests (Radcliffe, & Bos, 2011). More specifically, the scale scores for the

African American and Hispanic populations scale scores for reading, math, and science revealed that they are being poorly prepared for higher education (2011).

### **Research Method**

I used a phenomenological study design to explore and describe 18–24-year-old African American male college students lived experiences of when they were in middle school and high school, regarding college preparation, college planning, and college attendance. Researchers use a phenomenological study design when they want to explore everyday human experiences through the eyes of participants (Moustakas, 1994). In addition, researchers use the phenomenological approach when they want to share what the lived experiences meant to the people who experienced the phenomenon. In this phenomenological study, I collected data to describe the lived experiences of 18–24-year-old African American male students during middle and high school regarding college preparation, college planning, and college attendance.

### **Research Approach Considerations**

A number of researchers already identified factors, challenges and stereotypes that at-risk African American youth encounter that creates a barrier for college attendance (Radcliffe & Stephens, 2008, 2010). Bluestein et al., 2010 listed the following as barriers: (a) students' awareness of culture bias and stereotypes, (b) students' philosophy about school and work, and (c) students' participation in college readiness programs. Little research, however, exists that share 18–24-year-old African American students' experiences in middle school and high school about information they received regarding



postsecondary education. African American male students, who end up attending college, have not been able to share their experiences concerning the messages that they heard while in middle and high school that affected their decision to attend college. A study focused on African American male students between the ages of 18 and 24 who are attending college may provide important information concerning pathways to higher education that educators in middle and high school may be missing. Studying this group of older adolescents, who are currently enrolled in college, may inform counselors in middle and high school concerning additional support and interventions that may encourage college attendance amongst the African American male population who are currently an underrepresented population in college student bodies. Researchers have rarely consulted with students, which has caused a gap in the literature.

I conducted this study by interviewing seven, 18–24-year-old African American male students. Then I compiled the information from each interview to establish themes that might help explain the disparity in African American postsecondary education attendance. I hoped the study provided a report on the conditions and the relationships present. In addition, this study provided insight into the processes that are going on which influences middle school African American students' views about college attendance. From the data, possible barriers that prevent African American students from attending college were discovered; as well as the students' experiences of any inequalities, challenges, and/or stereotypes associated with their educational journey.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The researcher serves as an important component in qualitative research. Because I worked closely with participants, I identified any biases, values, and/or personal background that might interfere with his or her interpretation during the study (Creswell, 2009). Below, I explored my own bias in relation to how it may relate to this study. In addition, I discussed measures that were taken to address this bias. Finally, this section included an outline of the researchers' role in the study.

### **Research Biases**

As an African American who was a middle school teacher and is a middle school counselor, writing about the experiences of other African American students was challenging because some of the data involved the role of middle school teachers and school counselors. However, I was careful when collecting data to ensure my personal experiences and preconceived notions based on previous events did not interfere with the analysis of data. Because I am an African American school counselor, I acknowledged any potential bias that might have interfered with data analysis. I know the challenges students may have encountered based on previous data and professional relationships with current middle school and high school students from where I work. However, I did not allow previous learned information interfere with my data analysis. I treated each interview as a new opportunity to learn about students lived experiences and refrained from prejudging, drawing conclusions, or making inferences about students. I kept an open-mind to learn about each student and let data drive the results. Finally, I only

concluded what the research results indicated and stuck to the facts. To conclude participants were reminded, in writing when signing the informed consent form, and verbally during the interview, that they can withdraw from the study at any time.

### **Addressing Research Biases**

To help maintain objectivity, I also: (a) Documented any thoughts and feelings throughout the research process that will be shared with the dissertation chair (b) Shared dissertation drafts and received feedback from peers, and finally (c) Prior to beginning research, I wrote a reflective essay about her own personal experiences as an African American female student who is now pursuing a PhD.

### **Researcher Role in the Study**

In this research study, I served as the only investigator and refrained from including personal thoughts while conducting research. In addition, I conducted any follow-up interviews or interviews for students who were absent on the original scheduled interview days. Finally, I was the only one to analyze the data obtained during the interviews to identify themes for the study.

## **Methodology**

### **Participant Selection**

For the purpose of this research, I focused on what 18-24-year-old African American male college students recalled from middle school and high school about college preparation, college planning, and college attendance. I used criterion sampling

to invite participants, who met the criteria, to participate in the study. Below, I describe how I found participants for the study.

After IRB approval, BS # (05-08-15-0248748), first I gained permission from colleges to advertise. After I secured permission to put up invitations to participate in my study, I went to a university and a junior college to put up the fliers on the designated bulletin boards where the college personnel gave permission for me to post the fliers. The invitation to participate in the study is attached (Appendix A). In addition, I used the following digital resources to advertise and invite participants to take a part in the study: the listserv HBCU-L @LISTSERV.JMU.EDU, the website <https://www.facebook.com/HBCU-Lifestyle-172145349469867/timeline/>, and Hope University's college website. Interested participants contacted me by phone or by email to set up a time for the interview. When I received an email or a phone call from a potential participant, I did an initial screening to determine if the person met the study criteria. After determining they met the study criteria, I scheduled a time with each participant for the individual interview.

I continued to gather participants for the study until the saturation of data were accomplished, which typically would occur between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> interview. Saturation of the data were reached at the seventh interview. Then I removed the invitation to participate flier from the university and college boards. At the beginning of each individual interview, I shared the informed consent form verbally and in written form with the potential participant. I verbally explained specific procedures, expectations, confidentiality rules, and reasons for signatures. Participants also had the opportunity to

read the consent form, and I invited each participant to ask any questions that he needed answered.

For the purpose of this study, I used a small sample size in order to facilitate more in-depth exploration with each participant. Choosing to use a small sample size allows researchers to submerge into participants' lives or the current issue to get a better understanding, as well as drive data that are more meaningful. Qualitative research allows researchers to spend more time on specific cases over an extended period. Finally, using a smaller in-depth rich data process allows researchers to learn a lot about the central issue. Researchers have more time to become acquainted with participants, gain an insight into participants' world, and learn about their culture and everyday life. Maxwell (2005) explained how using too many cases in research become "unwieldy" (p.30), and the data become too intense. Using a larger sample would prohibit researchers from spending quality time with each participant. Therefore, I interviewed 7 participants for this study. I stopped collecting data when participants' answers became repetitive and I could not find any different themes.

### **Data Collection**

The researcher used interviews as the only method of data collection for this study. Seven men answered in-depth interview questions, which were developed based on critical race theory (CRT) (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001), during a one-hour interview. Data were collected from two in-person interviews and five phone interviews during September thru January in the Mid-Western United States. When I received an email or a phone call from a potential participant, I did an initial screening to determine if the

person met the study criteria. The “phone script” that I used to determine if they met the criteria included: What is your race? What gender do you consider yourself? How old are you? Were your middle school and high school in the Midwest region? If a person met the study criteria, I scheduled a time with the participant for the individual interview.

After I gained appropriate consent for the interviews, I conducted individual interviews with participants. (Please see Interview Guide, Appendix B). I tape recorded interviews using an ION Twin Video recorder to ensure that I did not miss anything participants said. I was mindful of allowing each participant the opportunity to share his lived experiences of when he was in middle school and high school, regarding college preparation, college planning, and college attendance.

First, I built rapport with participants to help establish positive relationships. In order to establish the positive relationship, I considered the type of questions to ask participants in order to receive in-depth rich data. I conducted one-on-one interviews with participants and was mindful of allowing each one an opportunity to share his perspective about when he was in middle school and high school. I prepared concise and open-ended questions to ask participants as well as allowed time for them to share whatever they felt necessary to share in relation to the research topic. Considering emergent design is an important quality of qualitative research, I allowed time for pop-up questions throughout the interviews (Creswell, 2007). The questions are outlined in the Interview Guide (Appendix B). Next, I considered how much work, time, and effort is needed to conduct productive interviews. Considering that interviewing participants is “taxing” (Creswell,

2007, p. 140) due to the extensive amount of work required for phenomenological studies, I allotted an hour of time to interview each participant.

Protocol was established and followed as outlined in the interview guide. Additionally, I prepared myself for the interviews by checking the tape recorder to ensure it worked. Then, I reviewed the Interview Guide to make sure I was familiar with the questions. To help establish protocol, the Interview Guide included the following: the title of the interview, date, location, researcher's name, the participants' names, a brief description of the interview's purpose, and the previously stated questions. When participants arrived, I greeted them warmly to establish positive rapport. I informed them of the purpose for the research; how their participation would help; confidentiality; the length of the interview, and asked if he still agreed with the taping. I constantly smiled and made eye contact with participants to let him know I was listening.

The questions were arranged in a specific order for several reasons. Patton (2002) referenced to "beginning an interview with questions about noncontroversial behaviors, activities, and experiences" (p. 352). I began the interviews with a simple question to allow participants to provide a straightforward easy answer. In a taped interview (Laureate Education, Inc., 2010) Dr. Crawford referenced to interviewers as scientists and artists, and as an artist, the researcher will develop a relationship to establish comfort with participants to ensure he contributes as much as possible to the study. Later in the interview, I used more probing questions to elicit in-depth responses from participants. Finally, I ended the interview by asking students if they wanted to add anything to the

interview that was not covered by the questions. I concluded with positive rapport and thanked participants for participating.

All the interviews were concluded within the allotted hour timeframe. After I completed the in-person interview, the participant completed a demographic questionnaire (Appendix C). The phone interview participants completed the same demographic questionnaire and sent it back via email. In closing, I informed participants that they may or may not be contacted in the future for follow-up interviews or for phone conversations, if they were willing. In addition, I explained how participants may contact me if they would like a summary of the study's findings when I am finished. All participants left their contact information with me, and I thanked them for their time.

### **Data Analysis**

To analyze data, I used a tape recorder to ensure I did not miss anything participants said. After the interviews, I transcribed the data within a week of the interviews. Next, I created codes from all the data, which I later organize into themes. From the themes, I looked to see if any patterns existed. Finally, I organized the data and used the patterns to write the discussion for this study. In regards to confidentiality, I locked my notes and tape recorder in a locked cabinet to ensure the files remained secured until I had time to convert the notes to an electronic file. I typed up my notes and secured the information in a file on my computer, was passcode protected.

In my proposal, I stated that I would use Nvivo to code data, but I changed my mind and decided to hand code all data. To help me stay organized, I organized data in



the following manner. To identify significant statements, I went back to the original transcripts and read each narrative several times to gain an understanding of participants' meanings for each question. I identified statements that highlighted participants lived experiences to create themes and clusters. I started out with seven major themes, but as I examined each transcript more in depth, I saw more commonalities. Therefore, I narrowed the seven themes down to only four major themes. I used the themes to write a description of their lived experiences including when and how they experienced it. For each transcript, I created a table, which included significant statements, the page number in reference to each significant statement, themes, and the formulated meaning for each significant statement. Next, I divided the formulated meanings into categories, clusters of themes, and themes. I reviewed the literature to explore other possible themes, like the Critical Race Theory (CRT). I went back to the literature to see if the CRT fit the data that I collected. According to Delgado & Stefancic (2008), CRT consists of three major themes. After searching through the literature, I found other studies that shared similarities to my study. Carter (2008) used CRT as an analytical framework, too. I reviewed his study and found significant statements that aligned with my study. Then, I used CRT as an overall framework to condense the themes down to four. Two of the themes closely align with CRT and two of the themes are specific to my study but contain dimensions of CRT. I took each theme and wrote them on chart paper. Under each theme, I found statements from participants' narratives that aligned with each theme. As a result, I finished analyzing data with four major themes.

The four major themes that emerged from the data were: (a) Awareness of inequality/stereotypes/discrimination (b) Support from influential people who helped prepare participants for college (c) Experiences with programs (d) Importance of teacher/student relationships. The first theme relates directly to CRT because African Americans possess a critical race consciousness, which means they know because of their race, they will encounter educational and life challenges (Carter, 2008). African Americans live in a society where society members perceive them as subordinate to other races; additionally, African American citizens also earn the least amount of money in society and perform academically low in school (Carter, 2008). African American children and adults struggle daily to overcome the stereotypes placed upon them due to the color of their skin. In spite of the obstacles African Americans encountered, they persevered to overcome the barriers, and made the choice to go to college. In chapter 4, each theme will be presented with examples from participants' narratives.

### **Verification of Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is an important part in qualitative research that researchers must address. Trustworthiness includes researchers showing the validity, credibility, and quality of the study. I interviewed each participant to improve quality, because allowing assistants to conduct interviews may pose a potential threat to the quality of the study (Creswell, 2007). In addition, I provided clarity for each question to ensure each participant understood and knew the meaning. Finally, I immediately reflected on the interviews to secure the quality of the information; because waiting too long may cause me to forget something or make guesses, which may cause a threat to the quality of the

data. I ensured the findings made sense by recording verbatim answers from different participants.

Several strategies to ensure validity exist for researchers to use in the actual research study. Maxwell (2005) also explained different types of threats to validity and ways to eliminate the threats. Therefore, the researcher eliminated research bias by selecting data that fits the theory. Maxwell (2005) suggested researchers explain any potential biases that may affect the study as well as how he or she will deal with it to reduce any threats to validity. Therefore, as previously mentioned, I included a section in the study explaining any potential bias that might interfere with the study.

In addition, the researcher used triangulation to collect data from diverse participants, as well as triangulation with the methodologist to secure validity. Next, I participated in the study with an intensive long-term involvement. In addition to participating in the study, I later contacted some participants with questions to follow up on some things that were unclear in the first interview. Maxwell (2005) explained long-term participant involvement and repeated interviews provide more data that are complex; therefore, I used this strategy to increase validity. Finally, I solicited feedback from participants to secure validation. "Receiving feedback will rule out the potential of misunderstanding what participants said, their perspective, as well as identifying personal biases and misunderstandings of what the researcher observed" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 111).

Credibility represents another part of trustworthiness in a research study, because researchers want the audience to believe what they read. Credibility represents a part of

trustworthiness in a research study, because researchers want the audience to believe what they read. According to Creswell (2014), credibility refers to the ability of the research results to vividly reflect the experiences of the target population. In order to establish credibility, participants and experts give feedback to the researcher about the conclusions that are drawn from the data; and if that data accurately represents their individual experiences. First, I eliminated any suspicion of me sharing bias in the study. I informed participants that “I engage in a systematic search for alternative themes, divergent patterns, and rival explanations in my research study” (Patton, 2002, p. 553). I provided evidence that supports the patterns and themes used. As previously stated, used a triangulation technique to collect data. In regards to credibility, triangulation provides credibility to research because “each method reveals different aspects of empirical reality; multiple methods of data collection and analysis, which provides more depth for the research” (Patton, 2002, p. 556). I immediately eliminated any suspicion of predisposition or bias towards the study by “discussing my dispositions, revealing any possible bias, and engaging in mental cleansing processes” (Patton, 2002, p. 553) prior to beginning the collection of data.

Additionally, Creswell (2014) noted that in order to establish credibility, researchers need to use at least two different approaches when conducting research. To ensure credibility establishment, I used member checking and reflexivity. In regards to member checking, I conducted follow-up interviews with participants to ensure that the data collected and the data analysis process were reflective of participants’ experiences. We communicated via email to confirm accuracy of the data. I needed clarification on

two of the participants' information, so I emailed them to clarify any responses that were unclear. Next, I used reflexivity throughout the process beginning with study development and memoing within the data collection and analysis methods. As a result, a comprehensive establishment of researchers' perspective was noted throughout the study and utilized to ensure accurate data analysis and emergent themes represented participants' perspectives and it not being a product of researcher bias. To conclude, I consulted and debriefed with my committee chairperson as well as with colleagues regarding research methods, data analysis, and data collection to ensure I conducted the research with credibility. Ensuring validity, trustworthiness, and credibility includes a lot of work, but must occur to ensure the researcher conducts an effective qualitative research study.

### **Ethical Issues**

Ethical issues exist for all researchers. In fact, "all qualitative researchers encounter many ethical issues that surface during data collection, in the field, and in analysis and dissemination of qualitative reports" (Creswell, 2007, p. 141). Interviewing participants pose potential ethical issues. To eliminate ethical issues, IRB approval was secured prior to the study and the researcher secured informed consent forms from all participants prior to the interview. Informed consent is necessary to satisfy ethical obligations because the study contains more than minimal risk of harm to participants (Rudestam & Newton, 2007). In the form, the researcher informed participants about confidentiality, the purpose of the interview; explained the reason for recording; and the

timeframe for completing the interview to ensure participants understood the process. In addition, the consent forms included explanations to reassure participants' rights will be protected during data collection; notation of potential risks; assurance that the participant may withdraw at any time; and necessary contact information (Creswell, 2009).

Researchers must consider the possibility of receiving information from participants that may potentially harm others. Therefore, I established procedures that aligned with my ethical obligations, which included deciding to reveal what I learn or not to reveal what I learn. "The ethical code for researchers includes protecting the privacy of the participants and conveying this protection to all individuals involved in the study" (Creswell, 2009, p. 91). I took all necessary precautions to ensure all participants' rights were protected. One way to ensure their rights are protected includes the researcher following the Institutional Review Board's (IRB) guidelines. In addition, research studies must comply with IRB ethical standards, with the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) ethical standards, and with the American Counseling Association (ACA) standards as well.

The IRB allows researchers to focus on one ethnic group, but the researcher must include a clear rationale for excluding other ethnic groups. Therefore, the researcher included a clear rationale of why she chose African American male college students opposed to other marginalized groups. The researcher's rationale for choosing African American male college students involved their educational future. Research already exists showing a major gap in college readiness and college attendance between the

African American ethnic group and other ethnic groups. Although ethnicity is private, the researcher honorably respected non-African American college students.

In addition, ethical issues exist when researchers collect data. The researcher protected data by using pseudonyms for participants and place names to protect their identities. The data were stored in a locked file cabinet so no one could accidentally see confidential information. Considering I am the only individual involved in the research, I had complete ownership of all research data. According to Creswell (2009), researchers need to keep analyzed data for a reasonable amount of time. Therefore, I will keep the data, locked and stored, for seven years before destroying it.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to describe what 18-24-year-old African American male college students recalled from middle school and high school about college preparation, college planning, and college attendance. I used a phenomenological approach to allow a marginalized group to share their experiences during their middle school and high school years regarding their college attendance.

I used criterion sampling to invite participants, who met the criteria, to participate in the study. Seven African American male college students accepted the invitation to participate in the study. I stopped looking for participants when data saturation occurred and themes developed. For data analysis, I used a tape recorder to record each interview, which I later transcribed. From the transcription, I created codes and themes to develop significant statements.

To conclude, issues of trustworthiness and ethical procedures were also addressed in this chapter. In regards to issues of trustworthiness, I used triangulation in the following manner: to collect data from diverse participants, keeping the methodologist involved, and with my long-term involvement. I used member checking and reflexivity to ensure credibility. Lastly, I followed ethical guidelines to protect participants from potential danger by ensuring they understood and signed a consent form with all the necessary information provided.

In Chapter 4, I cover the setting, demographics, data, data analysis, themes, evidence of trustworthiness, and the results the study.



## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to describe what 18-24-year-old African American male college students recalled from middle school and high school about college preparation, college planning, and college attendance. The following research question guided this phenomenological research: What are the experiences of African American male college students, between the ages of 18–24, regarding college preparation, college planning, and college attendance when they were in middle school and high school? The study provided an opportunity for a marginalized group to speak out and share their experiences and acknowledge the barriers that impeded their academic success.

In this chapter, I cover the following: data collection setting, demographics, how the data were collected, the process of data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness (including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the data collection process), and the final results.

### **Setting**

Two face-to-face interviews were conducted in an upstairs reserved conference room of a public library. The participant and I sat at a rectangular wooden table away from the door that led into the library. The door which led into the library was wooden with no windows or peep holes in it. There was only one window in the room, which was located to the right of the participant. The blinds were open enough to allow the sunlight

in, but not enough for anyone from the outside to see inside because we were upstairs. The participant sat to my right, close enough for the recorder to pick up his voice clearly. The interviews took place without any interruptions. After the interviews, the participant left first, and I waited for a while to ensure no one made any connections between the two of us.

Five phone interviews were conducted in my home office with the door closed. I was alone during the entire time of each phone interview. On one of the calls, the participant had a bad connection, so I had to repeat questions several times. During one interview, the call was disconnected. I immediately called back, noted that the connection was lost, and continued the interview.

### **Demographics**

Demographic information included each participant's major and classification in college. The majors included electrical engineering, civil engineering, mechanical engineering, public relations, business management, and criminal justice. All participants identified themselves as African American males between the ages of 18 and 24, living in the Midwest, and attending a college or university. More specifically, four of the participants were between 18 and 21 years old and two were between 22 and 24 years old. Three participants attended a university; three attended a community college; and one took online courses.

The participants shared similar characteristics. Four went to college to play a sport, but they changed their minds once college realities of extensive practice and

dedication to the sport prevailed. Five came from a single-parent family, where the mother was the biggest support system for them and their college attendance. These five grew up in an inner-city whereas the schools were labeled with having students with behavior issues and were the first to go to college in their families. Three participants took Advanced Placement classes; one was in the International Baccalaureate (IB) program; one was in the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program; one had English as a Second Language (ESL) assistance due to a language barrier; and two took regular classes.

In addition, the following is an overall demographic summary for the participants. English was the primary language for five participants; whereas, one participant spoke another language for his primary language. In regards to the highest level of education that their parents completed; two of the participants' parents completed high school or equivalent, three of the participants' parents had some college experience, and three of the participants' parents had earned a Bachelor's degree. Five participants were single, and one participant was married. Two of the participants lived on campus, three of them were renting, and one of them owned his own home. Four of the participants lived at their residence for less than a year, and two of them lived at their residence for 2-5 years. Five participants were born in the United States, but one participant was born in Africa. Finally, participants revealed a wide range of their current household income; including two under \$10,000, two between \$10,000 and \$19,999, one between \$40,000-\$49,999, and one between \$50,000-\$74,999.

In contrast, several differences existed between participants. Most importantly, a participant explained how he knew a long time ago that he wanted to attend college, and college attendance was not an option in his family because his mother is an educator. One participant was married and took online courses opposed to attending a land based institute. Only one participant disclosed that he was from Africa. He was born in Africa, but came to America to go to college for better opportunities in life. A language barrier existed because his English was not the best, and he had no family in America and only a few people he considered friends. Another participant was abused as a child, missed a couple years of school, and was placed in several foster homes. He used the challenging events in his life as motivators to succeed, graduate from high school, and go to college. Lastly, one participant misbehaved a lot in high school, was locked up as a juvenile, but turned things around because he did not want to end up being a statistic labeled by society. He waited four years post high school to attend college, and he just completed his sophomore year at a community junior college.

### **Data Collection**

Seven men answered in-depth interview questions, which were developed based on critical race theory (CRT) (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001), during a one-hour interview. Data were collected from two in-person interviews and five phone interviews during September thru January in the Midwest. When I received an email or a phone call from a potential participant, I did an initial screening to determine if the person met the study criteria. The phone script that I used to determine if they met the criteria included: What

is your race? What gender do you consider yourself? How old are you? Were your middle school and high school in the Midwest region? If a person met the study criteria, I scheduled a time with the participant for the individual interview.

After I gained appropriate consent for the interviews, I conducted individual interviews with participants (see Interview Guide, Appendix B). I tape recorded interviews using an ION Twin Video recorder to ensure that I did not miss anything participants said. I was mindful of allowing each participant the opportunity to share his lived experiences of when he was in middle school and high school, regarding college preparation, college planning, and college attendance.

I concluded the interviews within the allotted hour timeframe. After I completed the in-person interview, the participant completed a demographic questionnaire (Appendix C). The phone interview participants completed the same demographic questionnaire and sent it back via email. In closing, I informed participants that they may or may not be contacted in the future for follow-up interviews or for phone conversations, if they were willing. In addition, I explained how participants may contact me if they would like a summary of the study's findings when I am finished. All participants left their contact information with me, and I thanked them for their time.

### **Variation in Data**

I anticipated conducting in-person interviews with three to ten African American male college students ages 18-21, who met the required criteria, to share their lived experiences during their middle school and high school years regarding information they

received about college preparation, college planning, and college attendance. I planned for advertisement of participants to last only three to four weeks, but that did not happen. Due to lack of participants, I changed the age group to include 18–24-year old African American male college students. In addition, I added phone interviews to increase the chances of securing participants. Because of time constraints and the saturation of data, I stopped advertising at seven participants.

### **Data Analysis**

To analyze data, I used a tape recorder to ensure I did not miss anything participants said. After the interviews, I transcribed the data within a week of the interviews. Next, I created codes from all the data, which I later organize into themes. From the themes, I looked to see if any patterns existed. Finally, I organized the data and used the patterns to write the discussion for this study. In regards to confidentiality, I locked my notes and tape recorder in a locked cabinet to ensure the files remained secured until I had time to convert the notes to an electronic file. I typed up my notes and secured the information in a file on my computer, was passcode protected.

In my proposal, I stated that I would use Nvivo to code data, but I changed my mind and decided to hand code all data. To help me stay organized, I organized data in the following manner. To identify significant statements, I went back to the original transcripts and read each narrative several times to gain an understanding of participants' meanings for each question. I identified statements that highlighted participants' lived experiences to create themes and clusters. I started out with seven major themes, but as I

examined each transcript more in depth, I saw more commonalities. Therefore, I narrowed the seven themes down to only four major themes. Then, I used the themes to write a description of their lived experiences including when and how they experienced it. For each transcript, I created a table, which included significant statements, the page number in reference to each significant statement, themes, and the formulated meaning for each significant statement. Next, I divided the formulated meanings into categories, clusters of themes, and themes. I condensed the themes down to four major themes. I took each theme and wrote them on chart paper. Under each theme, I found statements from participants' narratives that aligned with each theme. As a result, I finished analyzing data with four major themes.

The four major themes that emerged from the data were: (a) Awareness of inequality/stereotypes/discrimination (b) Support from influential people who helped prepare participants for college (c) Experiences with programs (d) Importance of teacher/student relationships. African Americans live in a society where society members perceive them as subordinate to other races; additionally, African American citizens also earn the least amount of money in society and perform academically low in school (Carter, 2008). African American children and adults struggle daily to overcome the stereotypes placed upon them due to the color of their skin. In spite of the obstacles African Americans encountered, they persevered to overcome the barriers, and made the choice to go to college. I discussed these themes below in the results section.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

Aspects of trustworthiness that Creswell (2014) identified were credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability.

#### **Credibility**

Credibility represents a part of trustworthiness in a research study, because researchers want the audience to believe what they read. According to Creswell (2014), credibility refers to the ability of the research results to vividly reflect the experiences of the target population. In order to establish credibility, participants and experts give feedback to the researcher about the conclusions that are drawn from the data; and if that data accurately represents their individual experiences. Creswell (2014) noted that in order to establish credibility, researchers need to use at least two different approaches when conducting research. To ensure credibility establishment, I used member checking and reflexivity. In regards to member checking, I conducted follow-up interviews with participants to ensure that the data collected and the data analysis process were reflective of participants' experiences. We communicated via email to confirm accuracy of the data. I needed clarification on two of the participants' information, so I emailed them to clarify any responses that were unclear. Next, I used reflexivity throughout the process beginning with study development and memoing within the data collection and analysis methods. As a result, a comprehensive establishment of researchers' perspective was noted throughout the study and utilized to ensure accurate data analysis and emergent themes represented participants' perspectives and it not being a product of researcher



bias. To conclude, I consulted and debriefed with my committee chairperson as well as with colleagues regarding research methods, data analysis, and data collection to ensure I conducted the research with credibility.

### **Transferability**

To support trustworthiness additionally, I established transferability. According to Creswell (2014), transferability is established through the use of a comprehensive identification of the research context and an explanation of the inherent assumptions central to the research. I addressed transferability in the current study within chapters one through three; discussing the rationale for the topic, research questions, and the method used to explore the research. Therefore, to allow for transferability to occur in other settings, I used thick and in-depth descriptions of participants' comments and experiences of when they were in middle and high school regarding college preparation, college planning, and college attendance so that the study results might be applied to similar settings and groups (Creswell, 2007). Rich and thick details emerged from listening to the interviews several times and repeatedly analyzing the data; which was verified by my dissertation chairperson. Furthermore, the discussion of limitations and recommendations presented in the final chapter reflect on the goal of addressing the ability to transfer the results to other contexts.

### **Dependability**

I set up an audit trail to ensure dependability. Creswell (2014) explained that dependability in research studies is reliant on the utilization of detailed procedures and

the researcher's awareness to the potential impact of situational factors. I focused on establishing dependability of the research results through various processes. For example, the use of time stamps on initial interviews and simultaneous memo-taking provided the means for me to reflect on potential situational effects, while continuous memo-taking throughout the process, provided me the opportunity to identify potential influences on the data results. In addition, the tracking of dates of data collection and their correspondence to my progress in the internship class was also beneficial in considering the effects that those experiences may have on the data results.

To conclude, dependability was assured in the study when I used only two locations to conduct the study. Each interview was recorded, transcribed, documented, and written in this chapter for readers to read. I set up data so there could be an audit trail if necessary. All transcripts, interviews, and documents will be on file in my office under lock and key. Triangulation occurred when I talked with my chairperson occasionally; we went through data; and we went through the literature to find correlations. In addition, I went through an extensive process of coding data. Finally, I went through each transcript to ensure the data is dependable. All information is kept under lock and key, and will be kept for 10 years just in case someone needs to check or review any information I collected.

### **Confirmability**

I established confirmability because I submerged myself into this research study. I have been with this study for a long time. To ensure participants' perspectives of their

phenomenal experience remained accurate, I read the literature, collected data via recorded interviews, read transcripts, transcribed the transcripts and began looking for themes. I stepped away from the study for a while, returned to read everything again to ensure I found the same themes as before. I consulted with my chairperson consistently, as well as with other peers. Then, I went back into the data again to ensure I still found the same conclusions from each narrative to establish confirmability.

### **Study Results**

The results were generated for this study from interview questions using critical theory (CRT) framework. I used 14 interview questions to address the main research question that guided this phenomenological research. I identified significant statements that highlighted participants' lived experiences to create themes and clusters. Under each theme, I found statements from participants' narratives that aligned with each theme. As a result, I finished analyzing data and the following themes emerged: Awareness of Inequality/Stereotypes, and Discrimination; Support from Influential People Who Helped Prepare Participants for College: Experiences with Programs; and Importance of Teacher/Student Relationships. Below, I supported each theme with narratives gathered from each participant. Each section will have different themes, with supportive narratives to address the three research questions from the study.

#### **Theme 1: Awareness of Inequality/Stereotypes/Discrimination**

Theme 1 emerged as participants described the inequalities, stereotypes, and discrimination they saw or felt regarding the differences in schools; their teachers'

behaviors, and perceptions from society as it related to higher education opportunities. They shared their experiences in middle and high school regarding their preparation for college and their decision to attend college. They recognized the differences location meant in regards to schools and teachers' perceptions towards them. Below, I provide supportive narratives from participants who shared their awareness of inequalities, stereotypes and discrimination and how these affected their experiences with higher education opportunities. To ensure confidentiality, all of the names are pseudonyms in order to protect the identity of the real participants. For example, Jake shared his awareness of the inequalities in course offerings at his school compared to other affluent schools. He stated:

Another thing with college planning that was good was taking AP classes. But the bad thing about it is that the schools around us that are more affluent, they offer that school the International Baccalaureate Program, and they have many more AP classes. They have so many more Ivy League classes. We have a decent amount of AP classes, but not as much as I would have liked. Additionally, you don't have as many options there...I could not take Spanish after my sophomore year because we just did not have enough classes offered for Spanish to fit in my schedule, compared to other schools where they had so much. They had {AP Chemistry, AP Cal, AP Cal 1, AP Cal 2, AP History and English}, which we have. But if you want AP Chemistry, AP Spanish, I just think that would be awesome to have a wide selection because that really sets you up and the AP

classes were helpful (UMHM), especially my AP English, which got me earning credit for B University and I do not have to take the AP here so.

Jake talked about being able to take AP classes at his school. He also talked about the differences between basic classes and AP classes in relation to discipline and student behavior. In basic classes, students would get thrown out, teachers would yell at students, and students were difficult to teach. Jake was not in basic classes, except for his history class. He said he asked someone about basic classes and the person said:

Because if you were in like one of these basic classes, you would see why teachers get so mad; you would see why they throw them out of the room, or stuff like that. They yell because kids are just so difficult. I saw it sometimes where the kids are like so abnormal difficult or where it is just like that sense of rebellion. In fact, some of the teachers didn't really care. Like, I wouldn't say they didn't care but being in an urban school where it is like a lot of time African Americans a lot of time misbehaving or something, teachers become adaptive to that type of personality, so they give off that kind of vibe in the room, you don't want to talk to them. That is a type of vibe that is bad because now the teachers are going to go like, why are the kids always like this or acting up?

Next, Jake explained,

Hmm, I went to a middle school that was part of District 000 to say, but it was like a gifted establishment, so only a certain number of students from each school were able to go to that school, and um, they did an IQ test I believe at B

University, and 60 students from around all the other schools in the district went to the gifted school which was South Gifted. So, from that I remember just kind of being around more diverse kids. It was a low African American population; but there were a lot of rich kids, a lot more I think diversity than I experienced at other schools. We had people that were Asian, people that were Indian, people that were White and a little bit of people were Black, mostly White, and compared to my elementary school, which was mostly Black.

Additionally, Jake witnessed the inequality of how students were treated and how that affects their potential for success. For example, Jake shared the following:

For students who are at one extreme where you are just doing bad and teachers don't like you and stuff, it is really hard to get into college. Let alone think that you are even capable of it. You are not going to feel like you are kind of capable sometimes to even go to college because you do not get rewarded for doing good; compared to the enriched students who are almost top 10 or top 10%. They get rewarded all the time. They are getting scholarships; they are getting slaps on the back; they are going to honor roll lunches, which is awesome. You go to those things and it make you feel good, make you feel like you're like kind of an upper bigshot. But the other students, they want to do good, too but they are not in enriched classes. I think they should be rewarded a certain way, too, so.

Jake recognized how teachers treated students unequally. Students who did well to begin with got rewarded by teachers; but students who were not doing well got pushed

aside. Those kids in the higher sections of classes got rewarded for doing well, but more importantly, Jake knew that they got those extra “slaps on the backs”, which encouraged students even more than tangible rewards. Those slaps on the back instilled in students a sense of purpose, belonging, and achievement, which he sees African American young men not receiving.

If you are not doing good in any of your classes, it is going to make it really difficult to go and talk to any teachers and some teachers, some kids just feel like the teachers are out to get them like that situation so I definitely feel like in some situations where I wasn't getting an A in the class compared to the classes that I was like excelling in and the teacher was much more on par with like Yo, good job! Some of the teachers didn't really care.

In addition, Jake recognized the affect that being in those advanced classes had when he said, “So even if being smart wasn't the truth, being in an advanced class would make you believe it. It was a placebo effect.”

Participants' knowledge about inequalities were demonstrated by Evan as well. Evan experienced the inequalities that existed in society regarding media broadcasting and representation on television; as well as the depiction of higher education for African Americans. The media wants to show African Americans in negative roles as living in inner cities infested with drugs and not attending college. However, the media wants to depict a different meaning for people living in the suburbs where everyone goes to college and they live a great life. Many positive African American men go to college or

have gone to college and live a successful life, but students only see the negatives. Evan shared his thoughts below:

A young black man does not want to go to school because there is no one on TV talking about how to get an education from our local schools. There was nobody there saying that, but like I said, we see, we see someone selling drugs, you know, people robbing each other, and things like that, so that is what our society does to us for a reason. We look at that. We don't look at the positive African American men who are in college, who have been through it. Students are motivated when they see things like President Obama being the president and things like that, you know. I think that helped out a little bit of people wanting to go to school because they see I have an actual Black president. Like I said, it all falls back to what we see on tv and things like that, where people, we see all the negative stuff and we don't see positive things.

Participants were aware of stereotypical experiences that existed during their middle and high school years as well that affected their experiences related to higher education opportunities. For example, Jake shared his recognition of stereotypes based on the type of school, who attended the school, or the location of certain schools. He stated:

But then you see kids from my school and they do drugs and they go to jail and they get caught for robbing or something like that. So, it is a different thing when drugs are sold in a primarily White school. It is almost like the code of a natural thing. But selling drugs in my school is like a hood type of thing or a gang related



view is placed on it. I remember the first time I saw weed I was like this is very uncomfortable; because I knew this was a bad thing or at least associated by culture.

Jake is saying that at White schools selling drugs is different from selling drugs at his school. Students who are caught selling drugs in his school, which is predominately African American, are stereotypic of a gang related crime; while that same behavior at a White school is seen as different. He referred to it as a code or a natural thing that does not get punished or carry the same stigma as an African American student selling drugs.

Furthermore, Jake shared how some teachers put stereotypes on students due to their physical appearance.

Some teachers are like, the kids are so bad, I love the kids, but the kids are so bad but I still love them anyway. But some of them are like; I hate going to work, the kids are so ghetto; there was this one girl who she got this weave or something.

Additionally, Scott's experience was related to society placing stereotypes upon him due to where he lived. Scott shared:

Because I come from a place where people tell you, people say well you will never be anything, and you know, people don't think you will ever be anything or amount to anything because of where you come from.

In regards to society stereotypes, David shared an experience as well. Part of the reason David agreed to do the study was to bring awareness to others and help make a difference. David shared the following:

What I have seen over the last course of the week was, and I realized that being African American, that I am always one left turn.

David said that he was always one left turn, which seems to mean that he is always one step behind White students. White students go in the right direction and see progression; whereas he goes left and have to try to struggle and catch up with others.

Finally, Seth implied that he did not want to fit a certain stereotype. He commented:

But when I, as I got older and got out of high school and got started working, I said that I did not want to be working at McDonald's or fast food and living that type of life all my life.

The participants experienced stereotypes that others had of them, but also recognized how stereotypes played a part of how they saw themselves, too. These stereotypes influenced their pursuit of higher education.

To conclude the theme regarding participants' awareness of inequality, stereotypes, and discrimination, participants discussed their awareness of discrimination during middle school and high school. Jake stated:

But if you are one of those kids at one extreme where you are just doing bad and

teachers don't like you and stuff, it is really hard to get into college let alone think that you are even capable of it; nonetheless if you are in the middle and you are in the lower, those lower sections, you are not going to fill like you are kind of capable sometimes to even go to college because you do not get rewarded for doing good compared to the enriched kids who are almost top 10 top 10% and they get rewarded all the time, they are getting scholarships, they are getting slaps on the back, they are going to honor roll lunch; which is awesome you go to those things and make you feel good make you feel like you're like kind of an upper bigshot, but the students who want to do good and they are just not in enriched classes; I think they should be rewarded a certain way too, so.

In addition, David shared his perspective on discrimination during middle and high school.

But that is why I was more than happy to do the study because there might be some outside factors that keep people from getting into college.

Finally, Shane's experience with discrimination included an experience with his teacher during middle school. Shane struggled with knowing or not knowing if a teacher had discriminated against him.

Maybe, in middle school our house caught on fire. I ended up not doing my homework that day. So, the next day at school, I told my teacher what happened and all that and, she sent me to the principal's office because I didn't have my homework and all of that stuff taken care of. But, the principal she told me to just

go back to class. She didn't know why the teacher sent me there. Honestly, I think it is because she did not like me. She just always, I guess gave that vibe. And so, I don't know because every other teacher, ah, I guess they enjoyed me in their class; but she just kind of was like always on me for like I guess, I don't know.

He sounded like he wanted to give her the benefit of the doubt, but he was not sure.

I don't know, I guess because I was a new student. I had just moved there. Um, but, ah, maybe that's the reason. And I don't want to bring like race into it, but I was also like... I was also the only African American in the class. And, probably 1 of 5 in the entire school. So, um, maybe that had something to do with it. But like I said, the other teachers, they enjoyed me in class.

So, Shane struggled with the fact that his teacher reacted to his skin color, but he did not want to believe it actually happened.

To conclude, participants explained the awareness of differences they saw in their middle and high school regarding their experiences of college preparation, college planning, and college attendance. Participants were cognizant of the inequalities, stereotypes, and discrimination that transpired during their middle school and high school years. Additionally, they recognized the differences in schools, classes, opportunities, teachers, and societal views. As a result of their recognition of inequalities, stereotypes, and discrimination, they decided to make college a reality to avoid stereotypical labels.

## **Theme 2: Support from Influential People Who Helped Prepare Participants for College**

This theme emerged when I asked participants about what people said or did that influenced them to attend college. Participants reported that there were influential people in their lives who helped prepare them for college, which included: teachers, counselors, coaches, college representatives, family members, peers, and friends. To begin, the following participants shared how professional educators influenced them and helped them make a decision to attend college. Their narratives are broken down into subcategories in the following order: teachers, counselors, coaches, and college representatives.

Participants shared how teachers influenced their decision to attend college. Jake shared the following:

I did have a counselor and some of the teachers and stuff and a lot of time the teachers were telling me, they were writing recommendation for me and which was awesome for applications. Another part included the help from teachers. The teachers asked us if we were thinking about going to college or if we had applied to any colleges. The counselors had presentations where you were like this is about college and this is why you want to take this.

He also stated:

When you have teachers that actually care, even in high school, coaches and stuff, who were like straight and like yeah, some kids are bad but you can do it. I remember a teacher called me, who was just a pool guard, at my school said hey, this is the future Obama right here, so um.

Jake seemed to recognize the affect that teachers who cared and showed compassion had on his preparation for college, as well as his decision to go to college. Guidance and positive comments from his teachers inspired him to continue his education.

Kyle referred to his teachers as being helpful and shared only a little about his teachers' influences regarding him and college attendance.

My teacher was like helpful, I was kind of trying to get to know everyone and I always asked my teacher for help. My teachers helped me to prepare for college. But that is how I got prepared for college.

Nevertheless, Scott had more to say about how his teachers prepared him for college.

So, where my 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher, he had showed me my, he had showed me my test scores, showed me how all of my tests were always like one of the best in the class. Um, different things like, different things in those areas. So, when I saw that, it showed me that, hey maybe I do have some good skills. Maybe I can be better than what a lot of people say I can't. When I took the test that JAC required, I scored way above the requirements. So, that showed me that when I

listened to my teacher, he told me that I just need to apply myself. I just needed to work hard and I can really go far in my education. I am glad that I listened to him. I am glad that I took heed to what he told me. Because if I didn't, I would probably still be in high school. You know, I would probably be in a special ed class, maybe.

In addition, Scott shared how another teacher helped make a difference in his life and influence his decision to attend college. He was a foster child with low self-esteem and tenacity until one of his high school teachers reminded him of his smartness and capabilities.

Um, also, one of my teachers from Poortown, where I went to high school, they also told me that I was really smart. That I should go to college, no matter what anybody says, ... I tried my best, and I got the ultimate results. So, if I can do the same thing when I was younger, now, then I can really go wherever I want to be. That is why now when people tell me, when I tell somebody that I want to go to Mulombia, they laugh, and I am just like. OK, well you can keep laughing, but I know what school I am going to because I know my determination.

Scott concluded by describing his favorite teachers and he gave tributes to them for helping him succeed.

Um, the pushing, the training, and making us scared to not do our worst. Like that is what I loved about, you know, I don't know, but my favorite, my favorite teachers were the teachers that I was scared of. My favorite teachers were the

teachers that would cuss me out if I didn't have my homework assignment or something like that. You know, the teachers that kept me on my toes. They didn't let you just do any and every thing because they actually cared. They actually cared about your future. That means they took away any other options but for you to succeed. You know, I love those teachers. Those teachers got me to where I am.

It is evident that Scott attributes his college attendance to his elementary and high school teachers. The support and guidance from them helped him learn independency, tenacity, and courage to do well in high school, graduate, and continue his education by going to college. He accredits their involvement in his life as the reason for him being where he is today.

David remembered how his elementary teacher went above and beyond to build relationships and inspire them to get an education. He acknowledged his teachers' influences by stating the following:

Um, I had a pretty good bunch of teachers. I'd say my most influential teacher in grade school would be Mrs. Dodds. I played basketball in high school and she kind of mixed some books along that with just the African American culture as well. She actually ended up following me to high school that next year. I didn't actually have her in that same class but she had a lot more faith in me than I did in myself. And just having someone try and care just as much as you about your own education you really don't have much of a choice but kind of kick it up a notch.



Additionally, David explained how teachers guided them in the right direction, which helped them plan for college.

Um, well, I would say the teachers really care about the students and they are really like passionate about their jobs. They directed us to a lot of websites and things like that because it did not fit into any other course requirements. But they found it important for us to see kind of see where we were going before we even get out of there. So, we sort of kind of had to find the information on our own, but um, they led us in the right direction, at least a couple of them at least!

Evan referenced to three people in his high school that supported him at a critical time in his life. His father passed away, and two of his teachers and his principal provided moral support with the loss of his father; as well as helped prepare him for college.

I had an art teacher and an English teacher, they both helped out, like I said, a lot. When I was in high school, I lost my father, and um, they really helped me stay focused with everything as far as you know, getting me ready for school. They went above and beyond helping me and pushing me. Um, also my principal as well. I had those three on my back, and they made sure I was still preparing myself for college, making sure I got my apps in for the schools that I wanted to apply for. They just helped out a lot with that, especially during that time of need.

Finally, Shane's experience was a little different than others' experience. He explained how only a few teachers were indirectly influential role models in his life.

Um, not really. I mean there were a few teachers that I liked, um, just their personality and things like that; but they never really talked about their college experience and things like that, that influenced me to do it, but I know that they had it in the background and just to look where they are at that time, I guess could have maybe influenced me.

Counselors influenced many of the participants and helped them prepare for college as well. Participants shared how counselors contributed to their college preparation, college planning, and college attendance. First, Jake explained how counselors helped him with scholarships and explained the various opportunities available to him.

Our counselors were easier to talk to because they were dedicated a lot of time helping with the college situation. The counselor would tell me about scholarships and opportunities in regards to the type of people specific colleges was looking for, which was really helpful. It was just people like expected me to do well in college, and I think that was a huge thing when you have adult figures and your peers are like oh you are going to make it big and stuff, and then you start to believe it with them.

Kyle is from another country, so he attributes all of his success in college to his professional educators. He explained how his counselor helped him in the following ways:

In high school, my high school had like college representative like counselor we had a college counselor so the high school representative, he helped me to um, like I am not from here. Um, my college counselor he taught me that whenever I apply for college make sure you wanted to know the location how far it is from home; how much initially it will cost; can you afford that tuition, because here in America you have to pay tuition. My school had a dean who held meetings, trying to prepare us for college. The dean talked about going to college and applying for scholarships during our junior year of high school. Something that is important is that without my counselor and teacher I couldn't be here of where I am at right now. My high school counselor said that they know college is not for everybody but they told me I should go to college. So, I did not know if I could go or if my family could afford it so but you know, after talking to my counselor and stuff they told me not to worry about it. We will make sure you apply for scholarships as early as possible.

To summarize how counselors influenced students by providing college information, advice, or by preparing them in some manner. Scott shared how his counselor helped him throughout his high school years, as well as ensuring he stayed on track academically.

In addition to teachers and counselors being influential in participants' lives. Kyle and Evan also found advocacy in their coaches in regards to college preparation, college planning, and college attendance. According to Kyle:

My soccer coach also helped me to get into college to practice, and worked with my counselor. He always before soccer, he tried to help seniors who wanted to go to college and it is funny because almost all of the soccer players all the seniors in my group we all went to college. So, my coach had a lot of impact on me. He helped me out and he would talk to us in the locker room or his office you know. So, like talking to my coach and my counselor about how I should apply and stuff like that really helped me to get into college.

Evan shared how his high school coach inspired him to get a college education and not to depend on his dream of becoming an NFL player. Evan shared how Coach L. motivated him to go to college so he could live his dream of being in the NFL. However, once Evan got into college, he realized that playing football was not an everyday thing that he wanted to do.

Kyle and Evan accredited their high school coaches as inspirational people for their college attendance. The coaches not only coached them; but they collaborated with their counselor, guided them in the right direction, and encouraged them to go to college.

College representatives represent the last group of powerful adult role models who were influential in students' decision to attend college. Below, Scott and Kyle share how college representatives inspired them to go to college. Scott's influence came from just being in the company of successful people who he knew went to college. When college representatives came to his school to speak, he knew they had nice things like he wanted to have some day, and they were helping other people succeed so they could have

nice things as well. Scott was inspired by their stories and decided to go to college as well. He shared some of his inspirations below:

Um, one thing that they all had in common was that they went to college. They all had nice things. They were all able to do things and to be an example to somebody, in another person's life. Especially, I remember one time seeing a president had come and spoke to one of the upper classes. She was just saying how, sharing a little bit about her story. She even said that she wasn't even going to go to college. And she said that she was so glad that she did. All of the people, most of the people that I came across, they all had in common, is that they really made that step and they trained themselves to do it. They put the foot down on themselves, and they said, I am going to do this for me because I want to better myself. And then that is what gave me the connection with them because I said well I want to better myself, too.

In addition, Kyle discussed how mentors and college representatives helped prepare him for college and helped him apply to colleges. He was involved in after-school programs and internships with mentors who inspired him. Kyle shared the following:

I had a mentor for my job so those people helped me to apply to college and I also did an after-school program right after school for teens. It was a program to help prepare students for college training, like tutoring and stuff like that. So, that program actually helped me prepare for college. They brought like college

representatives to talk with us about school from different schools, so like yeah those are the people who like helped me.

College representatives visited Scott's and Kyle's school to recruit students. However, instead of just recruiting students, they inspired Scott and Kyle to want to be like them. Hearing their stories and recognizing their success inspired them to want to finish high school and go to college.

Participants also talked about how family members influenced their decision to attend college. Participants shared how their mothers influenced them when they were in high school and they have been their greatest support system in their college experience. Jake attributed his mother in the following manner:

During high school, my mom was just like, you are going to have to basically go to college. You are going to have to get on the ball and almost like in the general sense that college is the only option. She made me feel like even if they did not inform you enough about college telling you like you get these vibes that you have to go to college or you will be a failure type of thing.

David explained how his college pathway was predetermined by his mother's influence because she was an educator, and skipping college was not an option. David talked about how his mother had weekly discussions with him about making good grades, doing his homework, and ensuring his GPA looked good so he could apply to colleges his senior year.

Evan explained how his decision to attend college was from observation of his mother's life and the inability to provide extra things for the family. Evan did not want to struggle or have the same type of life, so he went to college so he could provide for his family. Evan shared the following:

So, I just didn't want to have to see myself in that boat, where I can't please my kid every time he wants something or she wants something. So that would, that motivated me to know, because then, hearing all the people say that you can't do anything without an education. I am good with my hands, but I don't see myself staying in a factory for the next 50 years of my life, running a machine. So that influenced me to do better for myself and my life and to actually go out here and get an education, and have something behind my name and fall back on just in case something doesn't go my way. At least I would always, you know, have my degree behind me.

Finally, Shane shared how seeing his mother go back to college at a later age in life; as well as other family members go to college inspired him to want to go, too. He shared the following:

Um, influenced me? Probably my mom. Seeing her graduate um, my aunt, seeing her graduate, as well as my grandma. Um, those would probably be the biggest influences that kind of drove me. And always being told I have to get into college to get somewhere in life.

The final category of influential people who inspired participants to go to college or helped them prepare for college include peers and friends. Participants shared the following about how peers and friends influenced their decision to go to college. Jake stated:

I think for me personally, it was just people like expected me to do well in college go well and I think that was a huge thing when you have adult figures and your peers are like oh you are going to make it big and stuff, and then you start to believe it with them. Um, a huge influence was just the culture of just that like I was the kind of people being in enriched classes and being on that thing where I was getting an A, and I was getting rewarded for As; and I got to see things. A big part of that is that I got to go to a house, and not one house but multiple houses, where my friends' dad and moms were engineers that lived in big houses that I would call mansions.

Not only did peers and friends influence Jake to go to college, but their parents did as well. He saw how his friends' parents went to college, graduated, and earned nice jobs that allowed them to have nice things. His environment influenced him and helped him stay focused so he could graduate and go to college with hopes for success as well.

David attributed his college attendance to peers as well. He noticed his friends making plans for college, so he knew he must do the same. David shared, I looked at my fellow classmates, and I asked them if they had any other plans after high school. And I



had already been thinking about this since freshman year in high school, that I have to go to college, you know.

Finally, Evan shared how his life and his friend's life were similar, and they influenced each other to go to college. Evan explained:

UM, like I said, my best friend, he helped too as well. I um, pretty much both of our parents like I said, we never really physically struggled, but just seeing that having to worry about paying a bill that, that was pretty much both of our motivation not to you know, have our kids go through that situation or not having everything they want so, between myself and my best friend helping out, um, that is what influenced me.

To conclude, participants shared a plethora examples of how people supported or influenced them to go to college. All in all, teachers, counselors, principals, coaches, college representatives, family members, and friends influenced or helped participants prepare for and go to college. They all helped in different ways, but the end results were all the same, which was college attendance for participants.

### **Theme 3: Experiences with Programs**

Theme three emerged as participants discussed how programs helped them get to where they are now. Three of the seven participants talked about how their involvement in community programs helped them go to college. The exposure of being on a college campus impressed two participants, which was a major influence in their decisions to go

to college. Below, I shared quotations from 3 of the seven participants regarding their program experiences. Jake shared his involvement with different programs. He was involved in an engineering program that united him and other students in the district every other Saturday; which exposed them to engineering and allowed them to work on various projects related to engineering. He was involved in a program that allowed him to do college visits and an overnight stay on campus, which really intrigued his interest to go to college. Finally, he was involved with other programs that prepared him for college, too. Jake shared a little about the programs below:

The other aspect was that in middle school, the company PIL had funded a program called Destination Technology which was to get students exposed to engineering. Another preparation for college was like being on a college campus, eating on a college campus having someone talk to you, even though I wasn't aware of like exactly why this is such important. B University made that a lot better by having a scholarship program that I could enroll in. It was an overnight college visit for multicultural students. College representatives showed us that this is where you can stay here for a night, and these are some of the things you will experience at B University. A lot of Black fraternities and sororities putting in non-the less the alumni in our school, the people in our school the scholarships offered shows you that people care.

I think once again just participating in outside groups like TSTM (Tomorrow Scientists Today's Mathematician) and the rocket program made me want to go to

college. I guess kids who are in TSTM out of that group are high percentage of African Americans who will go to college compared to like an overall group who are less concentrated in high school. But, I feel like those groups were really helpful. Basically, students who participated in TSTM were statistically going to college more than students who were like just in one or like weren't in any. So, that is actually pretty affective, and I saw a correlation. I noticed that a lot of those people actually went to college.

Jake explained the benefits of participating in extracurricular programs. His exposure to various programs such as Destination Technology, TSTM, and Project Lead the Way inspired him to go to college; as well as helped him determine the major he wanted to pursue. He believed that participating in extracurricular programs in high school increases the chances for high school students to go to college.

Scott shared his experiences with a program that was offered at his high school. Similar to Jake, Scott experienced college visits as well, which influenced his decision to go to college. Scott shared the following:

I mean in high school, the only thing that I had that helped to prepare me for college was probably the AVID program. Um, it was just a class that I took every day that helped me with note taking skills, how to pay for college, and things like that. Yes, it was like a regular class, and I got credit for it and things like that. Um, it was a program that was supposed to help us with note taking skills, it helped us with, we went on college trips, and how to, you know, learned how to

live in college, how to save money and how to spend money in college, how to even pay for college. Um, how to look at different colleges that had what we wanted, and what colleges had what we wanted and what didn't. So, it was a lot, basically all about college; studying, preparing for the ACT, and things like that. It was mostly in the AVID program. There weren't really other teachers outside of the AVID program that really talked to us about, you know, us high school students about college.

To conclude, Seth's experience with extracurricular programs was a little different from Jake's and Scott's experience; but a correlation between programs and college attendance still exists. Seth shared the following about his program experience:

There was a beverage place, Puree Beverage that offered different intern programs. Students could work there for like a year, and they will get you certified into their little machinery program and stuff like that. Um, I was in this like old 70 with 80s program, which was like you go to school for half a day, and then you, the next half you go to work or something like that. UMHM. And it had like college prep classes for it, like the proper way to sign up for the SAT, a proper way to apply for college applications and stuff like that, and how to do a resume, and they told us how to do Word, how to write in APA format, which also prepared me for college, too. So, it was like basically half work, and we get a credit for actually going to work, getting paid for going to work.

All participants agreed that participating in extracurricular programs influenced their decision to go to college. The college information, preparation, presentation from visitors, and mostly, the college visits inspired them to want to go beyond high school and major in something they enjoyed doing. In addition to all of the above, the hands-on experience not only inspired participants to want to go to college; but it also helped them make a decision of what they wanted to major in when they went to college.

#### **Theme 4: Importance of Teacher/Student Relationships**

Building positive teacher/student relationships enabled students to feel comfortable talking with their teachers or counselors; which in return increased their self-worth and inspired them to want to do well in school so they could follow their aspirations of going to college. Four of the seven participants explained the experiences they had with their teachers and counselors in regards to college planning, preparation, and attendance. Below, they discussed their relationship experiences in middle and high school with their teachers or counselors. Jake explained how he felt comfortable talking with the teachers who established a positive relationship with him. According to Jake:

Those are the people I open up mostly about, I could actually talk about. You did not feel like you had to live up to anything because they actually I guess look at you as a person than someone they are just trying to destroy in their class with their words. They are trying to make you learn and actually talk to you, because now you feel more comfortable with the teacher on that basis that yeah, I did in your class, so now it makes me feel much more comfortable to go talk to you

now. If you are not doing good in any of your classes, it is going to make it really difficult to go and talk to any teachers.

Kyle was unsure about the relationship between him and his college representative (counselor), but he felt comfortable sharing things and talking with him. Kyle stated:

But I talk to my college representative. He asks like how are things going, do I need anything, is everything ok? He calls me or I call him like once in a month, to see how he is doing, or he might call me to see how I am doing and stuff like that. I don't know it seems like we are really like close.

Scott reflected back to the relationship he established with his third-grade teacher. Scott shared the following inspirational talk he had with the teacher.

When I was younger, we went through a lot of abuse issues, and I could finally tell, I could finally tell people that I trusted. And my teacher was one of them. And, you know, he was telling me, he was telling me about God and living right. I had faith, I had faith in God, and I believed in God, so always the topic on my mouth, always talking about God.

Scott built a relationship with his third-grade teacher and with God, which helped him succeed. He is in college now, but the positive relationship he established with his teacher early in life inspired him to pursue his dreams farther in college.

David summarized this theme by sharing how building positive teacher student relationships made students feel proud, determined, and want to succeed not only for themselves, but for their teachers as well.

Like, my high school really focused on trying to get the teachers to interact with the students, because it is an error where the value of education is decreasing, especially with so many distractions going on in day-to-day life. Once again when teachers go out of their way to create a personal relationship with a student and try to find their interests, I think it definitely pushes a student much farther than just being seen as in the group. And just having someone try and care just as much as you about your own education, you really don't have much of a choice but kind of kick it up a notch.

Participants described their experiences of when they were in middle and high school, regarding preparation, college planning, and college attendance. All participants shared contributing factors that inspired or influenced them to go to college. However, some participants shared their awareness of inequality, stereotypes, and discrimination during their middle school and high school years. They concluded by stressing the importance of building positive teacher/counselor-student relationships in middle school and high school regarding college preparation, college planning, and college attendance.

### **Summary**

In summary, participants' narratives created four major themes. In theme one, participants described the inequalities they saw or felt regarding the differences in

schools; their teachers' behaviors; and perceptions from society. In fact, six of the seven participants shared their inequitable, stereotypical, and/or discriminatory experiences they had in middle school and/or high school. Their experiences included awareness of segregation in schools. For example, predominately White schools, which had better opportunities for student success; opposed to predominately Black schools, which were provided with less opportunities for student success. Other participants identified labels placed upon them because of the SES or the area in which they lived. One participant made reference to African American males not having positive role models to look up to because the media only show African American men in negative capacities. Lastly, Shane shared how he was targeted by his teacher because he was the only African American in the class, and the only one of a few in the school.

Fortunately, participants had influential people to help them prevail past inequities, stereotypes, and discrimination. Supportive teachers, counselors, coaches, and parents helped them prepare for college in various ways. Participants shared examples of how important people in their lives helped them recognize their potential, push past the obstacles, and go to college.

Participants explained how programs helped them get to where they are now. Four of the seven participants discussed how various programs were successful pathways to their college attendance. Many of the programs provided hands on experiences for students and exposed them to careers that they never knew about prior to being in different programs. In addition to exposure to careers, participants also referenced to



programs that gave them college exposure as well. They talked about how going to college visits intrigued them to go to college. One participant talked about a program he was part of in high school that prepared him for college by teaching students academic skills that will help them in college. The program also provided opportunities for students to go on college visits. Lastly, participant six talked about a program that allowed him to go to school for half a day and work for the other half. This was a great opportunity for students to earn money while still in high school.

To conclude, four of seven participants discussed the importance of relationship building with influential people in their lives. Some shared their experiences with their teachers, counselors, coaches, and parents, who either inspired them or assisted them with college preparation, college planning, and college attendance. Jake stressed the importance of building good relationships with teachers and counselors because it gives ease and comfort when students need to talk with them. Kyle explained how the relationship with his counselors is ongoing and how he could not have gone to college without his help. Scott accredited his third-grade teacher and his most stern and caring teachers that held him accountable as the ones responsible for his college attendance. Similarly, David talked about how his teacher showed compassion for him; which in return, made him believe in himself and not want to disappoint his teachers. As a result, he enrolled in college.

In Chapter 5, I discuss the interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations for further research, implications for positive social change, and the conclusions of the study.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to describe what 18-24-year-old African American male college students recalled from middle school and high school about college preparation, college planning, and college attendance. I chose critical race theory because CRT allows researchers to provide a better understanding of issues related to marginalized populations. CRT provided a theoretical foundation for examining (a) the influences of racism on inner-city African American students and (b) their experiences regarding college preparation, college planning, and college attendance (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). This study allowed the voices of African American males to be heard so that they could contribute to ending the social injustice in public schools.

During the interview, I asked students about their educational experiences via three research questions: (a) What are the experiences of African American male college students between the ages of 18–24 regarding college preparation, college planning, and college attendance when they were in middle school and high school? (b) What experiences in middle school and high school do African American male college students identify as being influential to their decision to attend college? (c) What are the characteristics of a successful pathway to college amongst African American male students?

This study was conducted to provide an opportunity for a marginalized group to speak out and share their experiences of how well schools did or did not prepare them for

college and to acknowledge barriers that impeded their academic success or academic readiness for college. Even when [say what kind] programs existed in middle schools, completing high school and going to college was still a challenge for some students, especially African American students. In fact, many students do not graduate from high school or attend college because of an inadequate curriculum or inadequate preparation for college attendance (Huerta et al., 2013). African American students have shown poor college readiness compared to other populations (Radcliffe & Stephens, 2008). It was expected that enlightened counselors and educators would recognize an increased need to implement a curriculum that would support African American male students, starting in middle school and continuing into high school, and enhance their college readiness.

Key findings from the study gave insight of how well schools did or did not prepare African American male students for college. First, six of the seven participants shared their inequitable, stereotypical, and/or discriminatory experiences they had in middle school and/or high school. Second, six out of seven participants shared how influential people helped them prevail and get past inequities, stereotypes, and discrimination. Supportive teachers, counselors, coaches, and parents helped them prepare for college in various ways. Participants shared examples of how important people in their lives helped them recognize their potential, push past the obstacles, and go to college. Third, four of the seven participants discussed how various programs were successful pathways to their college attendance. Many of the programs they attended? provided hands-on experiences and exposed them to careers that they did not know about. Lastly, four of seven participants discussed the importance of building relationships with

people who helped them go to college. Some shared their experiences with their teachers, counselors, coaches, and parents, who then either inspired them or assisted them with college preparation, college planning, and college attendance.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

The findings of this study confirmed the research on the inequity and barriers African American male students' experience during middle school and high school regarding their college preparation, college planning, and college attendance. For example, in Chapter 2, Blustein et al. (2010) identified the fact that African American students experienced high risk of not completing high school and advancing into college. Nevertheless, regardless of the barriers and obstacles they encountered, participants shared how influential people, programs, and relationship building helped them overcome them both and go to college.

Additionally, findings of this study confirmed the research on the struggles African American students experience in regards to their college preparation, college planning, and college attendance as explained by Gibbons and Borders (2010). For example, all participants were African American male students who shared their challenges they experienced in middle school and high school in an attempt to go to college. Gibbons and Borders (2010) found that African American male students do not make it to college due to lack of resources, and because they lack the knowledge about college preparation.

Another finding consistent to the literature involved the importance of building teacher student relationships. Participants shared how building positive teacher/student relationships enabled them to feel comfortable talking with their teachers; which in return, increased their self-worth and inspired them to want to do well in school so they could follow their aspirations of going to college. Participants remembered as far back as a third-grade teacher who influenced them, which showed the importance of building positive teacher/student relationships. For example, Scott shared:

So, where my 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher, he had showed me my, he had showed me my test scores, showed me how all of my tests were always like one of the best in the class. So, when I saw that it showed me that maybe I do have some good skills. Maybe I can be better than what a lot of people say I can't. When I took the test that JAC required, I scored way above the requirements. So, that showed me, you know, that when I listened to my teacher, he told me that I just need to apply myself. I just needed to work hard and I can really go far in my education. I am glad that I listened to him. I am glad that I took heed to what he told me. Because if I didn't, I would probably still be in high school. You know, I would probably be in a special ed class, maybe.

Participants expressed that they felt comfortable talking with certain teachers, and they felt like teachers had their best interest at heart. In fact, participants shared that building positive teacher/student relationships made them not only want to succeed for themselves, but also for their teachers- to make them proud of them.

In comparison, research in chapter two showed how teachers realize the importance of building teacher/student relationships and the negative effect it has on students when positive teacher/student relationships do not exist. Henfield and Washington (2012) indicated that teachers knew a problem existed, but they did not properly contextualize the problem or know how to fix it. Teachers knew the importance of developing positive rapport and relationships with African American students, but many were found to lack skills or knowledge to understand culturally and racially diverse students. With the deficiencies, teachers were unable to engage African American students. Based on the results from the study, Henfield and Washington (2012) explained how teachers recognized the need for them to receive multicultural professional development to enhance their effectiveness with African American students, which in return might enhance African American students' academic performance.

Other findings consistent with the literature included the effect support from influential people, participation in programs, and teachers building relationships with students had on their college attendance. For example, participants shared that support from their teachers, counselors, and coaches were responsible for them being able to go to college. In contrast, the literature in chapter two shared how Hilgendorf (2012) concluded that African American male students lacked a strong support system at school regarding their education. Therefore, educators were advised to strengthen the support systems of African American students and to set goals to help African American male students succeed in school.

Additionally, participants' involvement in various programs gave them the knowledge and exposure to college life; as well as sparked their interest in potential careers. Similarly, research in chapter two showed that creating college cultures (allowing high school students to take college visits) increased African American students' awareness of college opportunities, as well as empowered them with positive self-concept and self-esteem (Radcliffe & Stephens, 2008). Additionally, Radcliffe and Stephens (2008) explained how mentoring and providing college visits impact at-risk African American middle school students' aspirations to attend college. The experiences in high school helped them see the possibilities that they could explore in college. Those experiences made their dreams and aspirations become a reality because they could actually see themselves doing the things they were exposed to during their college tours, programs, and internships. In comparison, after participants from this study experienced college visits and mentoring opportunities, their perceptions about college became more positive and they became more excited about attending college.

In addition to exposure of college life inspiring students to attend college, parental support influenced them as well. Radcliffe and Stephens (2008), reported parental involvement improved students' academic achievements and increased the percentage of high school graduates. However, sometimes in spite of many African American parents' desire to provide support for their children, they cannot due to the lack of skills, knowledge, or understanding of how to help their children. Because of these inabilities, Radcliffe and Stephens (2008) found that African American parents relied on teachers and counselors to provide resources and guidance for their children. With the proper



academic encouragement and support from the school and their parents, African American students began in middle school envisioning and setting goals for college attendance (Radcliffe & Stephens, 2008). Similarly, participants from the study attributed educators and their parents for helping them set goals to go to college. Scott shared how another teacher helped make a difference in his life and influence his decision to attend college. He was a foster child with low self-esteem and tenacity until one of his high school teachers reminded him of his smartness and capabilities. David remembered how his elementary teacher went above and beyond to build relationships and inspire them to get an education. Finally, David explained how his college pathway was predetermined by his mother's influence because she was an educator.

Findings in this study extended the knowledge of research by sharing African American male students' experience of when they were in middle school and high school. For example, participants explained their awareness of inequalities, stereotypes, and discrimination they experienced in high school. Research in chapter two provided details of how African American students received poor preparation for a higher educational experience, which created a gap in college preparation between them and White students (Radcliffe & Stephens, 2008). African American male students in this study elaborated more and explained how they see the difference in college preparation and opportunities for them compared to opportunities for White students. Their awareness included the location of schools, the opportunities for more advanced classes that would prepare them for college curriculum; as well as help them succeed in college, and the teacher tolerance and behavior towards African American male students. Participants recognized the

inequalities in course offerings at the predominately African American school, which only had a few challenging courses offered; compared to other affluent schools with predominately White population, which had more classes to choose from and opportunities to take AP classes. Previous research reported how White teachers working in urban low SES schools submitted to deficit thinking; and as a result of their deficit thinking, teachers lowered expectations for minority students by modifying the curriculum and eliminating assignments and/or required readings (Henfield & Washington, 2012). Teachers stereotyped minority students; which affected the way they communicated with and taught African American students.

Also, African American students saw how student behavior dictated the way teachers responded to students. African American students witnessed the inequality of how students were treated and how that affected their potential for success. Students in regular classes with behavior issues did not receive rewards, but students in enriched classes constantly received rewards. Getting rewards boosted self-esteem and self-confidence and instilled a sense of purpose and belonging; which participants did to see happening amongst African American male students. In comparison, previous research explained how racial identity affected African American students' self-concepts, attitudes, and beliefs toward education (Carter, 2008). Students with positive self-concept were found to have higher academic achievement; whereas, students with low self-concept about racial identity yielded to the negativity and stereotypes associated with African Americans; which resulted in poor academic performance (Carter, 2008).

The findings of this study are consistent with the theoretical framework presented in chapter two. African American male students shared their experiences with racism, and they said White students prevailed over Black students. They experienced stereotyping by teachers, the curriculum, and the media. Carter (2008) showed how educators used CRT to address and to teach the hidden and foreseen negative impact racism has on minority students, which was useful to this study. African American students shared their awareness of inequality, stereotypes, and discrimination in their schools, which can all be understood using CRT.

I used CRT as a framework for this study, which described seven 18 to 24-year-old African American male college students' lived experiences in middle school and high school regarding the information they did or did not receive about higher education. Existing research explained the inequitable experiences African Americans encounter in educational settings. In addition, the chosen question for this study builds upon existing research and demonstrated relevance to CRT in similar ways. What the present study did differently, however, was it allowed the voices of marginalized students to project so they can contribute to ending the social injustice existing in public schools.

Furthermore, the findings of this study aligned with previous research. For example, Carter (2008) provided an insight to African American students' perceptions towards race and racism pertaining to their academic achievements. Students' awareness of the stereotypes and negativity associated with African American's resulted in their poor academic performance. In fact, many African American youths aspired to attend

college, but their dreams failed to become reality because they were not equipped with adequate academic, social, and/or emotional support necessary for a successful college career (Carter, 2008).

Based on CRT, Grover (2010) explored how racism affected the success of students of color. He wanted to understand their perspectives of racism at their schools, and he discovered that racism was significantly manifested at their school. Henfield and Washington (2012) used a CRT lens to examine race and make connections between racial influence and African American students' academic success. Teachers failed to engage or challenge African American students academically, and they used a modified curriculum to teach them. Additionally, Radcliffe and Stephens (2008) used CRT as a theoretical framework to examine the role racism played in the shaping of schools, school practices, and African American students' perceptions of attending college.

In comparison, participants in the study recognized racism that existed in their schools and how it affected them and their potential for success. The lack of encouragement, support, and rewards from teachers lowered their self-esteem or tenacity to even want to go to college. Additionally, participants were aware of the stereotypes placed upon them due to their physical appearance or because of where they live. However, regardless of the stereotypes, discrimination and marginalization participants encountered, they still attended college because of the support from their teachers, counselors, coaches, family members, college representatives, and other variables. To conclude, participants decided to make college a reality to avoid stereotypical labels.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Limitations in this study exist. First, only African American male college students participated in the study. Students from other races or other genders might have something to share as well regarding their experiences in middle school and high school about college preparation, college planning, and college attendance. Therefore, the experiences in this study do not include all minorities who have a perspective about the preparation they might or might not have had for college. Second, the study only focused on African American male students from the Midwest; which prohibited the opportunity of learning about African American male students' perspective who live in other regions. Comparing students' perspectives who live in the South or West might have added more validity to the existing research. Also, participants self-identified and others who did not participate may have shared different experiences.

Third, a smaller sample size of seven was used, opposed to the original three to ten participants I anticipated on using. Only seven participants were used because I experienced difficulty in acquiring participants willing to participate in the study. Nevertheless, saturation of data was accomplished from using only seven participants when participants' answers became repetitive and I could not find any different themes. However, using a smaller sample size allowed me to facilitate more in-depth exploration with each participant; submerge deeply into participants' lives to gain a better understanding of their experiences; and to drive meaningful data.

## **Recommendations**

As a result of this study, many recommendations exist for future research on African American male college students lived experiences of when they were in middle school and high school. First, interviewing African American male students from other areas of the country could provide additional information about their experiences. Secondly, interviewing 18–24-year-old African American male students who did not attend college could provide information that aligns with the information provided by the participants who did go to college. A comparison of both perspectives could add value to the importance of educators preparing African American male students for college during their middle school and high school years.

Participants were aware of the inequalities in course offerings at schools compared to other nearby affluent schools; therefore, a study could be conducted to explain why all schools within the same district do not receive the same educational opportunities. This study showed how discipline, student behavior, and teacher behavior differed significantly between students who participated in advanced classes compared to students who participated in regular classes. Therefore, additional studies might provide more information on why the differences occurred.

Another recommendation includes participants experience with programs. In this study, participants shared how programs influenced their decision to attend college. A quantitative study could be done to survey college students regarding the programs they participated in while in middle school and high school. Finding out the percentage of

students who participated in programs and went to college could add to the existing research. In addition, research that shows how many students participated in the same programs would help as well. Programs that were participated in the most would show educators that they are essential programs that need to exist in all schools to help students succeed and go to college.

Additionally, a quantitative study can be done that shares African American male students lived experiences of when they were in middle school and high school regarding college preparation, college planning, and college attendance. A survey might be conducted where participants respond to questions regarding their awareness and perception of inequality when they were in middle school and high school; as well as responding to questions regarding any support systems they might have had that helped them get into college. A quantitative study might confirm and solidify the findings from this study, as well as provide more information about the existing themes. This qualitative study generated the themes, that now can be quantitatively tested or surveyed with a larger population for a more in-depth understanding of their lived experiences of when participants were in middle school and high school.

Based on the research presented in Chapter 2, recommendations for this study exist. First, there is a lack of research that describes 18–24-year-old African American male college students lived experiences in middle school and high school regarding the college preparation they did or did not receive. Hilgendorf (2012) explained that African American male students lack support regarding their education, and he concluded

educators need to strengthen the support system and set goals that benefit all students.

This study provided information on positive support systems for African American male students, but additional research is still needed in this area.

### **Implications**

This study showed the value in ensuring African American male students receive adequate preparing in middle school and high school for college; as well as ensuring they are treated fairly and provided the same opportunities as others to attend college.

Participants shared their awareness of inequality in middle school and high school regarding their educational experiences. They were glad to share their experiences, and one participant even shared that he was glad to do the interview because his information might be able to help other African American male students identify factors that prevent them from going to college. African American male students represent a group that have a lot to say and need to be heard.

Participants from this study shared their experiences of when they were in middle school and high school regarding college preparation, college awareness, and college attendance. They explained their awareness of inequality, stereotypes, and discrimination during their middle school and high school years; identified influential people who supported their endeavors to attend college; described their experiences with programs that enhanced their knowledge and skills, which sparked their interests in specific career paths; and finally, they expressed the importance of teachers establishing relationships



with their students. Participants reported that all of the above factors influenced their decisions to attend college and choose a major of their specific interest.

Additionally, this study has the potential to make a positive social change in society with specific focus on educational institutes. The findings from the research can be used at the district and state educational levels to advocate for students and help students become college ready graduates. The findings gave a marginalized group, African American male students, an opportunity to share their perspectives and educate counselors, teachers, administrators, and board members about the inequality they experience in middle school and high school; as well as educate educators about the value of providing African American male students with the necessary resources in middle school and high school that will prepare them for a post-secondary education.

For example, teachers building relationships and treating African American male students the same as White students could boost their morale and encourage them to want to go to college, because African American male students are aware of the different treatment they receive opposed to the treatment other students receive. Therefore, it is important to make educators cognizant of the differences so they can make a change. Additionally, keeping programs, internships, and college visits in high schools are important because they are essential factors in educating African American students about the many college opportunities; which may result in more African American male students going to college and choosing a major of their interests.

Intervening at the district and state educational levels will help African American male students become college ready high school graduates. The findings from this study inform African American male students that they are not alone in this tedious journey to acquire a post-secondary education. They can overcome barriers, negative connotations and stereotypes associated with them and college attendance; build self-esteem and self-confidence; and develop empowerment to overcome any obstacles they encounter. Which in return, will help build a better society and more educated male college graduates.

Education is valuable in securing financial stability for African American males. The benefits of securing a college degree include getting higher lifetime earnings; acquiring more knowledge and skills, which will enhance the chances for a better career with higher paying jobs; and finally helping to lower the unemployment rate. In 2012, the overall average unemployment rate for African Americans was 14.9%, and their average weekly income was between \$673.00 to \$668.00 (Karanja & Austin, 2014). Therefore, it is important for African American males to go to college, earn a degree, and find higher paying jobs.

Going to college have benefits for society as well as benefits for African Americans. For example, African American college graduates have lower poverty levels, rely less on government assistance, and have lower incarceration rates compared to African American non-college graduates (Karanja & Austin, 2014). For example, African American high school dropouts have a 60% chance of being incarcerated before they turn 35 (Karanja & Austin, 2014). In fact, “By year 2050, people of color are projected to be

the majority in the United States with African Americans accounting for the majority of the group (Karanja & Austin, 2014, p. 532). Therefore, it is proactive to ensure African Americans receive the education, training, and skills necessary to secure embrace the workforce. Ensuring African Americans are educated secures the United States workforce for native citizens, without forcing government to seek foreigners to fill the labor market. To conclude, creating a social change for African American male students can provide a pathway for them to follow regarding college attendance, achieving their goals, and making appropriate career choices.

Additionally, CACREP standards address the pathway to college; therefore, another implication includes ensuring counselors refer to the CACREP standards. According to CACREP Standard Section 5-B: Career Counseling, all professional counselors must have a counseling program that includes helping students develop life-career plans that focus on the interaction of work and other roles in life (CACREP, 2017). Therefore, helping African American male students plan and prepare for college is part of counselors' ethical obligation to all students.

Educators, scholars, writers, and activists use CRT to advocate for victims of racism and economic oppression in efforts to bring about a social change. In fact, CRT has been a lens for multiple qualitative studies of racial minorities in secondary and post-secondary academic settings. For years, researchers have used CRT as a framework to provide an insight of African American students' perceptions towards race and racism pertaining to their academic success and their perceptions of attending college (Carter,

2008; Grover, 2010; Henfield & Washington, 2012; Radcliffe & Stephens, 2008). In spite of all the previous research done with the anticipation of a social change, African American citizens live in a world where society members perceive them as a subordinate to other races, they earn the least amount of money, and they perform academically low in school (Carter, 2008). African American children and adults alike struggle daily to overcome the stereotypes placed upon them due to the color of their skin. African Americans must work hard to break the stereotypes associated with the African American race.

The use of CRT in this study showed how in spite of the obstacles participants encountered, they persevered to overcome the challenges, barriers, and obstacles to make the choice of going to college. Future studies can use CRT as a framework as well to share other African American students' experiences in middle school and high school regarding college preparation.

### **Summary**

This study showed that African American male students lived experiences in middle school and high school regarding college preparation, college planning, and college attendance was different from African American females and White students. African American male students shared their awareness of inequality, stereotypes, and discrimination that occur in middle school and high school. Additionally, African American male students shared how they overcame the above barriers by participating in various programs, seeking support from influential people, and building positive

teacher/student relationships. Participants explained how they were aware of the inequalities, stereotypes, and discrimination that took place in their middle school and high schools, but they overcame the circumstances and went to college. Their tenacity of wanting success and not yielding to the stereotypes of society views that a high percentage of Black males end up in prison, empowered them to go to college and major in a program of their interests. Hearing their stories validated my decision to conduct this study so other African American students can become empowered and educated about the struggles African American students encounter. Therefore, educators should use this study as an awareness awakening and collaborate with all stakeholders to make a social change regarding how African American male students are educated. As a result, more African American male students will be college ready without having to endure inequality, stereotypes, and discrimination during middle school and high school years. Instead, they can be well prepared to attend a post-secondary educational facility.

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## Appendix A:

**Seeking African American Male College Students**

to participate in a research study of African American Male Students' Perceptions and Awareness of College Attendance

for a study conducted by Linda Valentine-Cobb, a doctoral student in the School of Counseling at Walden University

**Time Required: 1 hour, telephone or face to face interview**

**Payment: \$10.00 Walmart Gift Card**

For more information please contact:

[linda.valentine-cobb@waldenu.edu](mailto:linda.valentine-cobb@waldenu.edu)

(331) 305-9014

This study has been approved by the Walden University IRB SBS # (05-08-15-0248748)

**Principal Investigator:** Linda Valentine-Cobb

**SAMPLE QUESTIONS INCLUDE:**

1. What happened in high school or middle school that helped you prepare for college?
2. What information did you receive in middle school and high school that helped you prepare for college?
3. When you were in high school, what **influenced** you to attend college?



## Appendix B: Interview Guide

**Title:** African American Male College Students' Personal Experiences of College Preparation During Middle and High School

**Researcher's Name:** Linda Valentine-Cobb

**Date:**

**Location:** A Midwestern Public Library or Personal Home Office

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study. As stated in the consent form, this study involves a recorded interview of 13 questions that will last approximately one hour. The information you provide will be kept strictly confidential and you may stop the interview at any time. Do you have any questions before we begin? Please let me know at any time throughout the interview if you have any questions. Let us begin.

*Use some rapport establishing questions such as: How are you? How are you doing today?*

“Ok, let’s get started. I will be asking you 13 questions about your experiences in Middle and High school regarding your college preparation and attendance.”

1. What happened in high school or middle school that helped you prepare for college?
2. What information did you receive in middle school and high school that helped you prepare for college?
3. Do you remember the first time you got information about attending college in middle or high school?

4. What information did you get?
5. Is there anything else you want to add that you think is important for me to know about your **experiences** in middle and high school regarding college attendance, college preparation, or college planning?
6. When you were in high school, what **influenced** you to attend college?
7. Were there specific people at your high school or middle school, as you can remember, that **influenced** you to attend college?
8. Who were they and what did they say or do?
9. Is there anything else you want to add that you think is important for me to know about what happened in middle school or high school that **influenced** your decision to attend college?
10. What helped you in middle school and high school to get to where you are now?
11. Do you remember any specific incidents that occurred in middle school or high school that made an impact on your decision to attend college?
12. Think back to the people you knew in middle school and high school that are not currently attending college. Do you think their experience in school was different from your experience in school?
13. If yes, how was their experience different from your experience in middle and high school?
14. Is there anything else you want to add to the study that was not covered in the interview?

“Thank you for sharing your experiences with me today. I enjoyed getting to know you better. I will listen to the tape of this interview and write down the information you gave to me today. Your interview information will be used to describe the experiences of African American Male students who are attending college. If you want to check your transcript for accuracy, I can email it to you, and you can email it back to me within a few days if you are comfortable giving me your email address. After all interviews are complete, would it be okay to contact you in the future to clarify some things? If so you can give me your email now. A copy of the results will be available to you upon request (please email me) after all research is complete. Thank you for participating and have a great day.”

RESEARCH QUESTION	INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
1. What are the experiences of African American male college students between the ages of 18–24 regarding college preparation, college planning, and college attendance when they were in middle school and high school?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What happened in high school or middle school that helped you prepare for college?</li> <li>• What information did you receive in middle school and high school that helped you prepare for college?</li> <li>• Do you remember the first time you got information about attending college in middle or high school?</li> <li>• What information did you get?</li> <li>• Is there anything else you want to add that you think is important for me to know about your experiences in middle and high school regarding college attendance, college preparation, or college planning?</li> </ul>
2. What experiences in middle school and high school do African American male college students identify as being influential to their decision to attend college?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When you were in high school, what influenced you to attend college?</li> <li>• Were there specific people at your high school or middle school, as you can remember, that influenced you to attend college?</li> <li>• What did they say or do?</li> <li>• Is there anything else you want to add that you think is important for me to</li> </ul>

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	know about what happened in middle school or high school that influenced your decision to attend college?
3. What are the characteristics of a successful pathway to college amongst African American male students?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What helped you in middle school and high school to get to where you are now?</li><li>• Do you remember any specific incidents that occurred in middle school or high school that made an impact on your decision to attend college?</li><li>• Think back to the people you knew in middle school and high school that are not currently attending college. Do you think their experience in school was different from your experience in school?</li><li>• If yes, how was their experience different from your experience in middle and high school?</li></ul>

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## Appendix C: Demographic Questionnaire

Please complete the following survey about yourself:

What is your age?

\_\_\_\_\_ Under 17

\_\_\_\_\_ 18 to 21

\_\_\_\_\_ 22 to 25

What is your primary language?

\_\_\_ English

\_\_\_ Spanish

\_\_\_ Other

What is the highest level of education that your parents have completed? Indicate M for Mother or Female Guardian and F for Male guardian or Father.

\_\_\_\_\_ Grammar school

\_\_\_\_\_ High school or equivalent

\_\_\_\_\_ Vocational/technical school (2 year)

\_\_\_\_\_ Some college

\_\_\_\_\_ Bachelor's degree

\_\_\_\_\_ Master's degree

\_\_\_\_\_ Doctoral degree

\_\_\_\_\_ Professional degree (MD, JD, etc.)

\_\_\_\_\_ Other

What is your current marital status?

\_\_\_\_\_ Divorced

\_\_\_\_\_ Living with another

\_\_\_\_\_ Married

\_\_\_\_\_ Separated

\_\_\_\_\_ Single

\_\_\_\_\_ Widowed

\_\_\_\_\_ Rather not say

Where do you currently reside?

\_\_\_\_\_ At home with parent or guardian

\_\_\_\_\_ On campus

\_\_\_\_\_ Renting

\_\_\_\_\_ Own my own home

How long have you been living there?

\_\_\_\_\_ Less than 1 year

\_\_\_\_\_ 2 -5 years

\_\_\_\_\_ 6 -10 years

\_\_\_\_\_ All my life

Where were you born?

\_\_\_\_\_ United States

\_\_\_\_\_ Other (if other please indicate \_\_\_\_\_)

What is your current household income in U.S. dollars?

\_\_\_\_\_ Under \$10,000

\_\_\_\_\_ \$10,000 - \$19,999

\_\_\_\_\_ \$20,000 - \$29,999

\_\_\_\_\_ \$30,000 - \$39,999

\_\_\_\_\_ \$40,000 - \$49,999

\_\_\_\_\_ \$50,000 - \$74,999

\_\_\_\_\_ \$75,000 - \$99,999

\_\_\_\_\_ \$100,000 - \$150,000

\_\_\_\_\_ Over \$150,000

\_\_\_\_\_ Would rather not say